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**The cross in time and the hidden hand of God : theology and the problem of evil, with reference to the work of Peter Forsyth and Austin Farrer**

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THE CROSS IN TIME AND THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD.  
THEOLOGY AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL,  
WITH REFERENCE TO THE WORK OF  
PETER FORSYTH AND AUSTIN FARRER.

Thesis submitted to the University of London  
in fulfilment of the requirements of  
the degree of Ph.D.

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## THE CROSS IN TIME AND THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD.

### ABSTRACT

The thesis is concerned to draw out and build upon the distinctively theological responses of Forsyth and Farrer to the Problem of Evil.

In my discussion of Forsyth, I seek to clarify the implications of Forsyth's commitment to the evangelical experience of redemption as a fundamental theological category. In connection with the Problem of Evil I argue that this commitment to this experience enables Forsyth to account, theologically, for an important characteristic of Christian and pastoral experience; that exposure to evil drives people to faith in God at least as much as it drives them away from it. I seek to present a systematic understanding of Forsyth's interpretation of the Cross as the "solution" of the Problem of Evil.

In my discussion of Farrer, I seek to draw out the relationship between Farrer's concept of contingency in the created order, and his notion of double (or multiple) causation. Farrer's concept of contingency also offers a theological account of the dual response of Christians to evil, analogous to Forsyth's.

In my comparison of the arguments of these authors I indicate some significant similarities in outlook, intention and emphasis. I argue that these similarities revolve around a similar understanding of the role of Theology. At least in relation to evil Forsyth and Farrer seem to agree that the place of Theology is to enable believers to integrate their apparently divergent experience into a comprehensible whole.

In a final chapter I attempt to construe the differences between Forsyth and Farrer, and the strengths and weaknesses of their arguments, in Trinitarian terms. I argue, in particular, for the fruitfulness of Trinitarian analysis and synthesis in connection with these two authors, and, in general, for the indispensability of Trinitarian reflection in the Christian theological response to the Problem of evil.

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Why bother with Forsyth and Farrer on Evil?

Some apology is perhaps needed for a study based on the thought of two relatively minor modern figures on a subject as ancient and intractable as God and Evil.

Forsyth and Farrer command our attention on the subject of evil because they regard the experience of evil as central to our apprehension of God. In Forsyth's case, it is his awareness of our fallen human nature which gives substance and significance to his proclamation of eternal redemption through the Cross. By contrast, Farrer makes extensive use of the concept of contingency to point to God, and to make sense of his nature. Farrer's understanding of contingency is very closely related to everything that we would not will: our suffering, our powerlessness, the failure of our projects.

One can read a fair amount about God and evil without coming across any theological account of a basic pastoral fact; that people come to faith as much because of their experience of evil as in spite of it. Without such an account, the inference that faith is a refuge for people who cannot face reality is hard to avoid. Forsyth's awareness of the Fall, and Farrer's awareness of our contingency go a long way to help us understand this phenomenon in theological, rather than atheological

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terms.

There is a further virtuous consequence of recognising the experience of evil as central to faith. Neither author is tempted to minimise or marginalise the evilness of evil. Where evil is regarded as a problem to be solved before faith is possible, it is tempting to make too little of evil, to emphasise its utility and its restricted scope. As Forsyth points out with some eloquence, faith which has succumbed to this temptation offers very considerable hostages to fortune<sup>1</sup>.

Perhaps a further explanation is needed for the attempt to frog-march two such different arguments so firmly in the direction of a Trinitarian synthesis. This is not an explanation that one would need to make to the authors themselves. Forsyth and Farrer are, in their different ways, great respecters of the tradition of faith. They see a large core of continuity in the faith of the Church through the ages, with which they seek to align themselves. Beyond doubt they consider themselves Trinitarian Christians<sup>2</sup>. I cannot imagine that they would resent Trinitarian criticism.

If an apology is needed, it is because there is a lingering sense that theodicy is a subject that falls largely within the domain of the

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1. Forsyth, P.T., *The Justification of God*, (London: Duckworth, 1916), p.30-31. One example among many. The idea is central to Forsyth's criticism of a whole strand of contemporary theology.

2.Cf. *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*. p.327. and *A Celebration of Faith* P. 72-77.

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philosophy of religion. Believing philosophers of religion, aware of other battles they must fight on other fronts, like to keep their metaphysical baggage to a minimum. A "solution" to the "problem of evil" that invokes the Trinity is, all other things being equal, less satisfactory to philosophers than one which does not.

Even if we can discuss the Christian understanding of God and evil without the Trinity, (which I doubt), we need the concept if we wish to make sense of Forsyth and Farrer. It is perhaps a tribute to the highly integrated nature of their thought that their Trinitarian shortcomings bear directly on areas where we might wish to question their understanding of the relationship between human beings and God. Our own experience of love would drive us, I believe, in the direction of a Trinitarian discussion, even if our commitment to the Nicene creed did not. With a Trinitarian keystone we can make a stable arch out of two substantial, but unbalanced, piers.

If such a stable arch can be built, I would take it as evidence for the following rather important propositions about theological discussion of God and evil:

- 1) There is something inherently healthy about an approach to Theology that understands itself as the attempt to clarify and articulate the ordinary experience, and the ordinary faith of believers. Theology is properly the analysis of faith.

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2) It is possible and important to avoid ways of understanding God and evil that become less plausible the more evil one discovers or experiences.

3) That the Trinity is rightly central to the way Christians experience and understand God and evil.

I must say at the outset that this study is not really intended as a contribution to Farrer studies, or (if such a thing can be said to exist) Forsyth studies. Nor, for that matter, does it offer "a theodicy", whether of the philosophical variety of which Forsyth is so dismissive, or even perhaps of the theological variety that he espouses. My overriding concern, as I indicated above, has been to provide a theological and intellectual framework for understanding what I have described as "a basic pastoral fact", that people come to faith as much because of their experience of evil as in spite of it.

The concerns of theodicy in this enterprise are therefore secondary, but vital. I have worked with *The Justification of God* and *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* in the conviction that they combine two important virtues. They both, I believe, have realistic understandings of the role the Christian experience of evil actually plays in Christian believing, and they both offer reasoned accounts of why it might be proper for Christians (and others) to react to their experience of evil as revelatory of God, rather than as a disproof of His existence.

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I should, perhaps, make three points about the method adopted in this work. I began my work on this thesis with an attempt at a detailed analysis of the arguments of *The Justification of God* and *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. Although I had expected some difficulty with *The Justification of God* I had imagined the orderly and lucid nature of the discussion in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* would make at least that task fairly straightforward. To my surprise it was not. While I could indeed connect some of what Farrer had to say with ideas that were familiar from the Anglo-Saxon tradition in the Philosophy of Religion, there were elements in Farrer's writing that were, from this perspective, obscure, or even perverse.

As for *The Justification of God*, it became apparent from a very early stage, as a consequence of Forsyth's rejection of philosophical approaches to theodicy (and the justice of much that he had to say on the subject), that I had to reconsider my assumptions about what kinds of discussion of God and Evil are possible and appropriate. In particular, it emerged that it was unhelpful, in this context, to work on the supposition that there is a simple, stable thing, which can be called "The Problem of Evil", and a range of relatively autonomous patterns of argument, each of which can be considered as "A Theodicy". Evil is a problem in different particular ways in particular theologies.

Indeed I have come to believe that the rather attenuated and anaemic quality of so much of the discussion of God and evil is a consequence precisely of the attempt to deal with "Theodicy" and "The Problem of



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Evil" as though they were separable, self-sustaining realms of discussion, rather than, by nature, specific problems and specific enterprises within a given pattern of theological endeavour.

To avoid reproducing in the reader the confusion that my studies originally produced in myself, the order of presentation is the reverse of the order of research. I have set out, first of all, analyses of the ways in which Forsyth and Farrer consider evil to be a problem, and not a problem, for Christian believing. Only when we know what "problem" they are attempting to "solve", can we see how their arguments might amount to a reasonable approach to the discussion of God and evil. For the same reason, I have largely avoided the use of "Problem of evil" and "Theodicy" in the opening pages of my discussion.

This produces a pattern of discussion that starts from the point where Forsyth and Farrer most signally differ, and indicates a convergence. The nature and significance of this convergence is the second point that I wish to make about the method of this thesis. It is perhaps hard to imagine two discussions of God and evil, in this Century and this language, with less, apparently, in common than *The Justification of God* and *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. We have, on the one hand, the work of a Free-Church Scot, a "Barthian before Barth", effectively barred from formal association with the ancient universities of England, writing his tortuous prose at a time of unparalleled slaughter, cultural and religious disorientation.

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On the other hand we have an urbane catholic Anglican, an exponent of Philosophical Theology, an Oxford man all his life, lucid, limpid, apparently untroubled by the tumultuous flow and ebb of Logical Positivism, and certainly addressing no particular national, cultural or religious crisis.

In presenting these two discussions as a convergence I have attempted to give form, methodologically, to a belief that I share with Forsyth and Farrer about the nature of Theology. They both consider Theology to be, at root, the expression and analysis of faith, and indeed they both regard metaphysics as one step further removed from faith, providing Theology with the terms, the intellectual tools, for the expression and analysis of faith. It is therefore entirely appropriate to start a discussion of these two authors at the point of greatest divergence, that is in their fundamental terms and categories, and to travel in the hope that there is, in faith, a deeper level of convergence.

I am anxious that this conception of faith should not be dismissed as too nebulous. Faith for Farrer and Forsyth is an experienced relationship with God, which the believer takes and chooses as the central organising principle for understanding and for living. If we believe that Forsyth and Farrer believe in One God, and that their experiences and discussions relate, in different ways, to the same God, and the same world, then there is every hope that, on this deepest level, at the tap-root, so to speak, of Theology, there will be a convergence.

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In my final chapter I speak about the possibility of synthesis of the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer, and I present a Trinitarian perspective on the prospects for a reconciliation of their patterns of thought. It will be clear that I am not attempting a to present a full synthesis, nor even outlining a third and new framework for the discussion of God and evil. There is no particular reason to believe that the deepest level of agreement between Forsyth and Farrer, at the level of faith, will lend itself to expression in words and intellectual structures other than their own.

Recasting the outlines of Forsyth's and Farrer's arguments in Trinitarian form, however, enables us to see how, without reworking their entire arguments, we can conclude that those arguments are complementary rather than contradictory. Chapter 7 is not a synthesis, and it is not a "Trinitarian Theodicy". It is an argument for construing a somewhat unexpected convergence in faith as an even more unexpected complementarity in thought. I hope it is also a small, practical, vindication of the use of Trinitarian categories as an analytical tool in Theology.

A third methodological point should not be ignored. I have concentrated almost exclusively on the coherence of the arguments that I have discussed, and the presuppositions and amendments that are necessary to render those arguments coherent. I have not, by and large, sought rational grounds outside those arguments to attempt to render them more plausible, except to comment that in this or that way the arguments seem

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to me to be true to Christian experience.

However, this should not be interpreted as a retreat from Theology as an accountable, public dialogue. The enlightened enterprise of seeking common ground between believer and unbeliever, and setting there the foundations of faith, or at least of reasoned response to the notions of God and evil, has not been a great success. It is probably true that much of the raw material of Theology is, in Farrer's terminology, "privileged", accessible to believers in a special way because they are believers. But much of the Christian dialogue with unbelief takes the form of an invitation to a kind of "seeing as". People are unlikely to take a great interest in the possibility of seeing their experience of themselves and of the world as experience of the dominion of a God of love, unless the coherence of such a suggestion can be sustained. Demonstrating the internal coherence of some Christian patterns of thought may not, in itself, make such patterns of thought plausible to non-believers, but it does at least make discussion possible.

In the remainder of this Introduction, I offer a kind of summary of the work as a whole, as a more detailed indication of its scope and focus. The study is divided into six chapters. The first pair of chapters set out the place that Forsyth's and Farrer's thoughts about God and evil seem to me to occupy in their more general theological commitments. The chapters seek to answer, in connection with each author, such questions as "In what way is evil a theological problem?" "What would count as a *solution* to this problem?" "How would we assess the success or failure

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of these arguments?"

The second pair of chapters offer reconstructions of the arguments of *The Justification of God* and *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. They discuss the specific strategies of the arguments that Forsyth and Farrer propose, attempting to make what is unsystematic in Forsyth, systematic, and what is implicit, in Farrer, explicit.

The third pair of chapters work towards a synthetic understanding of the two arguments. They indicate that Forsyth and Farrer have, at a fairly deep level, a common agenda and complementary strengths and weaknesses. This complementarity is explored by means of an investigation of the implications of Trinitarian thought for our understanding of the relationship of God and evil. The grounds for a synthesis are proposed on the basis of an element in the Christian experience of evil that is closely related to both the varieties of Christian experience that Forsyth and Farrer treat as paradigmatic.

### Part I, Setting the Scene

#### THE CROSS IN TIME

*Forsyth's search for metaphysical personal experiential certainty in the discussion of God and evil.*

The intuition of our fallenness classically arises, for Forsyth, from

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the evangelical experience of redemption. Only in the light of our redemption can we see the nature of the fall. The evangelical experience of redemption is an experience of the Cross of Christ acting invasively and authoritatively in one's own soul. It is the attempt to make sense of this experience, and to understand its implications, that drives Forsyth's thought.

A number of questions press in upon one who is determined to take this experience at face value. Firstly, what kind of a world is this, such that the Cross can operate with direct invasive causality in a soul? Secondly, what kind of a thing is a person, to be the subject of such invasion, and to know it for what it is? Thirdly, what is the relationship between this invasion, and those other channels of divine operation, the Bible, the Saints, the Church, Christian Culture, or History. Fourthly, how does one account for the compelling objectivity of the experience, and yet the apparent ability of whole churches and cultures to obliterate it?

There is no sign that the coming of the Great War disturbed Forsyth's trust in this experience, and the new grasp of reality that it had brought him. Every revelation of the fall is a further revelation of the significance of the experience of redemption. But the War did bring an investigation of the deep ambivalence of evil at the core of the experience.

It is precisely because evil is intractable and utterly hateful, that

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the evangelical experience of redemption is trustworthy. Victory over a lesser foe would not point so decisively to an external almighty redemption. But this same intractability and hatefulness makes it difficult to trust the experience of redemption. Our awareness of the fall poses the question. - How can we know something so strong and so hateful as evil, to be conquered and redeemed?

### THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

*How does Farrer's concept of contingency affect the purpose and nature of the argument of Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited?*

*For when the theist feels in his bones the inadequacy of natural causes to do the job of causing, with what does he underpin them? With a self-implicatory essence? That is a sophism of the schools, not the form of religious belief. No; the theist sees behind all causes the personal agent, the Creator...<sup>1</sup>.*

In his early writings Farrer thought that the root of the persistent and unanswerable human question "But why....?" was "Why is there something rather than nothing?" He held that the question pointed to an entity which enjoyed the greatest possible degree of fullness of being. He came to distrust this approach, in part because a Necessary Being

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1. Farrer. A., *Reflective Faith*, (London: SPCK, 1972), p.217.

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seemed to form no basis for faith or life. What kind of thing is a necessary being? How could one relate to it? What difference would it make to know that such a thing existed?

He concluded that there is a question to which the believer is driven by his experience of contingency, and that question is, "Why are things the way they are, and not another way?". This question points to a being that has the fullest possible causal efficacy, one that wills to be all that it is, and is all that it wills to be. Of this being, the question "But why...?" could not be asked. However, if one believes in a being that has the fullest possible causal efficacy, very practical questions arise: What is His will? What is His will for me? How does His will operate? Farrer's answer to the last of these questions is the doctrine of double causation.

In its most familiar form Farrer's doctrine of double causation concerns itself with the relationship between the ordinary finite or contingent causes operating in the world, and God's operation in the world as First Cause. The doctrine asserts that an event can be at once fully caused in the ordinary way of causation, and effectively caused by God. In order to make any positive sense of this notion, one must assume that the full set of ordinary finite causes of an event do not in themselves amount to a *sufficient condition* for that event. The same set of finite and contingent causes may, when all is known, result in a range of possible events. Within this range God makes his choice. God's providential care is, in part, the cumulative effect of these choices.



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The doctrine of double causation is highly counter-intuitive, and can be difficult to visualise. This may be because we operate implicitly with a picture of causation that has its origin in mechanics. The central point is that the fullest possible set of finite causes is not sufficient fully to bring about, or explain, any given event. We stand in a web of finite causes, but it is a loose web.

How can we know that God is at work, that He is choosing? Farrer's answer, both theoretical and practical is - By trusting and seeking to cooperate with that will; to go with the grain of God's creation. We must seek to draw upon the first causality of God. But if God is making practical choices about the outcomes of loose causal webs, why is there evil?

So, we are driven by our experience of contingency to seek the pattern of divine causation in our world. This takes trust. But it is precisely this trust in the operation of divine causation which is sapped by our experience of contingency in the form of evil. Contingency poses the question.- How can one have faith to work with the grain of divine causation in a world shot through with evil?

### **Part II, Reconstructing the arguments**

#### **AN ESSAY IN CERTAINTY**

## THE CROSS IN TIME AND THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD.

### *The Justification of God*

#### *Forsyth's Doctrine of the Eternal Causal Efficacy of the Cross*

*God vindicates His justice by saving man from the doubt of it, and not by demonstrating to him the truth of it*<sup>1</sup>.

The Great War presents Forsyth with an urgent pastoral problem and a spectacular theological opportunity. With his preacher's mind, and his preaching talent, he addresses these two as one.

The pastoral problem is the impact of the war itself on faith. Christian, civilised, European nations had turned on one another with dedication and ferocity. Many cherished hopes and beliefs, which people had associated with their faith, and with God, had come crashing to the ground. There was a serious danger that despair and spiritual vagrancy would be all that was left when the egoism and confidence of pre-war life had been destroyed.

The theological opportunity is the other side of the same coin. The complacencies of pre-war faith were underpinned by false theologies and metaphysics. Their collapse cleared the way for a search for a sounder foundation.

In effect Forsyth conducts a series of post-mortems on the patterns of

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.vi.

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faith that have perished. He finds that they are undermined by their moral and rational shortcomings. Some had placed their confidence in processes, which turned out to be fragile and reversible. Some had seen in the universe inescapable unities, which turned out to be only projections of the experience of the unity of the self. Some had abandoned systematic thought altogether. Some had desecrated their faith with a metaphysic that appealed to thought only, and could attain no purchase on the human soul.

From these post-mortems emerges a pattern of criteria by which to judge faith based on the evangelical experience of redemption. The effect is to clear the ground around what Forsyth takes to be the true faith, to define it as sharply as possible in our minds. It must then be brought to bear on the question in hand. In what relationship does evangelical faith stand to the evil of the war? He delineates a picture of a world essentially tragic, governed by the Cross. It is a picture of election, sorrow, saving judgment, and security in a victory already won.

## THE GOD OF SNAILS AND SONG THRUSHES

### *Farrer's Doctrine of Created Autonomy and Divine responsibility in a Causal Web*

Farrer's argument is a creature of two worlds. This can be seen in the concept of contingency around which it is built. In one way this is a high metaphysical doctrine, characterising the whole of our experience

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of the whole of creation in a single word. In another way it is the most mundane of truths, that things do not always go the way we wish, and that only to a limited extent are we masters of our own destinies.

*In Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* it is the level of common sense, common faith, and common evil that is explicit. Ordinary faith is driven to God by its experience of evil. Ordinary faith expects God to fight evil. What does ordinary faith lead us to say about the ordinary evil that happens to trees, to animals, to human beings?

As Farrer apparently garners common sense answers to the questions posed by more and more troubling varieties of evil, he is drawing on, and building up, a subtle and profound account of God's causation in creation. At its heart is the notion that there are levels of constitution within nature. Each level has its rights to autonomy, and to God's loving care. Subject to these each level also has its place in the wider plan of God for his creation.

Essential to the concept of constitution, and of divine causation, is the very concept of contingency from which the argument starts. The world is a loose causal web, full of possibilities, among which God chooses in accordance with his purposes. But so also, an animal body is a loose causal web of living matter, full of possibilities, among which the animal chooses in accordance with its purposes.

As a work of theodicy, the argument might best be summed up as the

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extension of a free-will defence to the whole of creation. God has created all sorts of good things, and part of his responsibility as their creator is to let them operate in accordance with their natures. Free-will defences can appear to distance God from his creation, making him a helpless onlooker of a dangerous but necessary experiment. Farrer's use of the concept of contingency and double causation ensures that he avoids this problem. He paints a picture of creation saturated, from the simplest material organisation, to the highest spiritual inspiration, with the just, active and contriving will of God.

### Part III, Making connections

#### FORSYTH AND FARRER; JERUSALEM AND ATHENS?

*What do the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer have in common, and what is the relationship between their arguments and other traditions of discussion of God and Evil?*

Evil drives us into a dependence upon God that is the basis of our faith, and a cooperation with Him that is the basis of our life of faith. It also discourages and mystifies us. If Forsyth and Farrer can help us understand this apparent contradiction, they are helping us to a practical understanding of the role of evil in our faith. From the point of view of academic Theology, however, their discussion is unnerving. They seem to work with different rules, and even aim for a different objectives.

## THE CROSS IN TIME AND THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD.

The reason for these unnerving divergences from the well trodden paths of academic Theology may be sought, in part, in Forsyth's and Farrer's distinctive starting points. Forsyth and Farrer start with intuitions which are, in more specific and less philosophical terms, fundamental to Christian faith. They are common property, lay property, in no sense the specific domain of theologians, or experts. These intuitions raise questions that can, and must, be discussed in the most rigorous possible way. But Forsyth and Farrer believe that the deepest answers to these questions are embedded, active, but not articulated, in the lives of those who seek to live by these intuitions.

It is these active, embedded answers that Forsyth and Farrer are seeking to articulate. Forsyth and Farrer are unwilling to abandon the perspective of the believing subject, because they hold that it is only from this perspective that God and his creation are comprehensible. Their requirement is for an account of evil that addresses human beings already trying to make sense of their redeemed fallenness, or their contingency. They wish to convince. They treat evil as integral to belief. They aim to explain faith to itself, to show what relationship it really stands in to evil.

## THE TRINITY AT WORK

*How the doctrine of the Trinity can sharpen our understanding of Forsyth and Farrer, and how, for Christians, evil is at root a Trinitarian problem.*

## THE CROSS IN TIME AND THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD.

We are, of course, both fallen and contingent. To concentrate too much on one or other is to leave alarming gaps in one's understanding of evil. True to his original intuition of moral inadequacy, Forsyth offers a theodicy of salvation. It is a moral theodicy, full of insight into the moral nature of God's saving work. It is relatively silent, however, about the creating work of God. On the other hand Farrer is true to his original intuition of contingency. He offers a theodicy of creation. His discussion of God's saving work can seem almost an afterthought.

And yet we find, to a limited extent in ourselves, and classically in the life of the Church a capacity for love, in Christ, that is free and redeemed, full and effective. Our experience of contingent, fallen lovelessness, and free redeemed love, drives us to God in the same way that Forsyth and Farrer conceive, separately, for contingency and the fall.

Our experience of ourselves as bearers and practitioners of love makes a promising ground for a synthesis of the thought of Forsyth and Farrer precisely because it is an experience with clear structural analogies to the experiences of the fall, and of contingency, upon which those authors build their arguments. It provides a strong synthetic impetus because it is clear that our failures in love are due both to our nature as fallen, and as contingent.

If love is understood as a third basis for the ambiguous Christian

## **THE CROSS IN TIME AND THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD.**

experience of evil, this enables us to address some of the shortcomings in the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer that are thrown into sharp relief by a Trinitarian analysis. It becomes possible for us to reformulate the problem posed by evil to Christian believing as the difficulty of understanding God's triune project, to create, redeem and sanctify love.



## THE CROSS IN TIME

### THE CROSS IN TIME

Forsyth's search for metaphysical personal experiential certainty in the discussion of God and evil.

#### 2.1 Forsyth's Distinctive Enterprise.

Some people can point to a particular moment in their lives as the time when God made a crucial and irreplaceable intervention, which changed their lives forever. For such people, this moment has a permanent and unquestionable authority. The rest of their lives are spent trying to live out the implications of this experience, and trying to make sense of the world in the light of this experience.

For anyone who has had such an experience, the prospect of a Theology, such as Forsyth's, that takes the evangelical experience of redemption as its fundamental term will seem immediately attractive. For Christians who can discern in their lives of faith no such experience, the prospect is likely to be less appealing. What reliance, we are inclined to ask, can be put upon something so narrow, so subjective, so derivative? What place can there be in such a scheme for the well-springs of our own faith, in Bible and Church, in Tradition and Reflection?

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One of the excitements of reading Forsyth is the discovery that when he sets out to expound the evangelical experience of redemption, and its unique, direct, causal link with the cross of Christ, he is attempting a full scale review of its relationship with these crucial elements in Christianity. What might be a narrow affirmation of faith becomes a wide ranging discussion of the central questions that faith must face. What kind of a place is the Cosmos? What kind of a thing is a human being? What is knowledge? How do we know God? What is revelation? What is the Church? Where is God in History?

Throughout this discussion Forsyth indeed accepts the authority of one thing only; the evangelical experience of redemption. Determined to make sense of this as the key to and understanding of the whole of reality, as the most real experience of all, Forsyth allows all commitments to the authority of the Church, or Bible, or Saints, or Tradition, to lapse, until they can be construed in terms of the evangelical experience of redemption.

If Forsyth avoids the objections that might surround such a project, it is because his thought is, in definable ways, at once profound and subtle. It is profound, in the sense that Forsyth is aware that he can only ascribe to the evangelical experience of redemption the full measure of reality and significance that he proposes, in the context of a metaphysics and a theological anthropology that lend themselves to this end.

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It is subtle in the sense that Forsyth attempts to elucidate the relationship between the origins of the evangelical experience of redemption, (Christ crucified, acting directly upon the Soul), and the expressions of that experience, in and through Church, Bible and History. In origin the experience is a donation, something given to the world from outside. In expression, the experience is derivative, made intelligible in terms drawn from others whose experience we echo. In effect however, the origin of the experience, and the expression of the experience cannot be separated. If the well springs of our own faith are in Bible and Church, in Tradition and Reflection, this is because we have recognised in them an expression of something that is present, but inchoate in ourselves, Christ crucified acting directly upon the Soul.

But even if Forsyth's thought is subtle, profound, and, as I am hoping to demonstrate, coherent, it would be going too far to say that it is systematic. Familiarity with Forsyth's work brings a familiarity with a consistent web of ideas with which he is working, rather than with a system of thought. It is a consistency that arises from repeated meditations on the implications of one basic theme, rather than from the attempt to draw up a theological system.

The concentration on the evangelical experience of redemption makes for an unusual agenda in the attempt to understand the relationship between evil and God. The evangelical experience of the redemption of the conscience has, for Forsyth the quality of a metaphysical, personal, experiential, certainty. "Metaphysical", "personal", "experiential" and

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"certainty" are concepts which bear a great deal of weight in Forsyth's discussions around God and evil. We must not underestimate the extent to which Forsyth was willing that we should reconstruct our entire understanding of our experience in the light of the evangelical experience of redemption.

It is necessary to grasp this notion of metaphysical personal experiential certainty, to have some sense of its richness in Forsyth's thought, before approaching the main argument of *The Justification of God*. We shall find that evil is a problem to Forsyth in very distinctive ways. Until one sees how Forsyth's "problem of evil" arises out of his understanding of the evangelical experience of redemption, *The Justification of God* is bound to seem a rather baffling and arbitrary book.

In three sections I shall attempt to give a presentation of the main contours of Forsyth's account of the evangelical experience of redemption, as a metaphysical, personal certainty. In the first section I shall ask, What metaphysics is necessary for the evangelical experience of redemption to be what Forsyth takes it to be? In the second section I shall ask, What must Persons be like for the evangelical experience of redemption to be what Forsyth takes it to be? In the third section I shall ask, How does Forsyth believe we can make the move from an experience to a Certainty, and what role does our experience of evil have in this move? I shall conclude with a discussion in outline of the implications of Forsyth's commitment to metaphysical

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personal certainty for his approach to the discussion of God and evil.

### 2.2 A Metaphysical Enterprise.

At the heart of Forsyth's thought, in all its aspects, is a single idea. This is the perception of a unique causal relationship between the evangelical experience of the redemption of the conscience, and the Cross of Christ<sup>1</sup>. Forsyth's understanding of the evangelical experience of redemption is essentially metaphysical<sup>2</sup>. Forsyth is in some ways dismissive of philosophy, at least as it bears on the Problem of Evil<sup>3</sup>. This should not distract us from the fact that he is a consciously metaphysical author<sup>4</sup>. This is not to say that he is a speculative author. The point is, more correctly, that he is an author who is aware of the implications of what he is saying, and who wishes that those implications be understood. If the evangelical experience of redemption is to be the touchstone of our thought, then this makes a difference, at the most general level of our thought, to the kinds of things that we believe there are in reality, and the kinds of relations that they can stand in to one another. These are metaphysical questions. It is

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1. See for example the discussion of Chapter II of *The Cruciality of the Cross*

2. This is the burden particularly of chapter III of *The Justification of God* but it is implicit in much of Forsyth's writing.

3. *But Philosophy is only the poetry and majesty of thought. It is truth writ very large and impressive to that kind of imagination. And there come crises when from this austere poetry also we turn unfilled and unstayed... The Justification of God* Pg. 137.

4. Cf. *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ* P.355-6

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necessary at the very beginning of our discussion of Forsyth to consider what metaphysics is necessary for the evangelical experience of redemption to be what Forsyth takes it to be.

*Metaphysic is the philosophy of totality. ...We have passed beyond a metaphysic of mere rarefied substance for that totality, what might be called the metaphysic of obvious and amateur pantheism...An ontological metaphysic is replaced by a metaphysic of energy, whose business is to develop the notion not of an abstract universal, but of a concrete totality, a living, rich and inexhaustible whole, a fullness of power and life.*<sup>1</sup>

To make sense of this we need to refer back to the experience I spoke of in the first paragraph of this chapter, of "a crucial and irreplaceable intervention". Let us for the moment take the experience of an irreplaceable and unmistakable conversion of the conscience as paradigmatic for the evangelical experience of redemption<sup>2</sup>. We must ask ourselves: "What else must be true, if the evangelical experience of redemption is an experience of the unique causal operation of the Cross of Christ<sup>3</sup>, and if this is an experience of a more profound reality than

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.59.

2. This is not the only form of the Evangelical experience of redemption to fall within Forsyth's discussion, but it is the most characteristic, clearest case. Cf. *The Principle of Authority* Pgs. 467-8.

3. In Forsyth's thought the Cosmic Christ and the Historical Christ, cannot really be separated. Forsyth's metaphysical reconstruction of reality is driven precisely by the need to show that the historical "Cross of Christ" is precisely the Cosmic "Cross of Christ" that is effective in conversion.

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any other experience?"

The following, at least, would seem to be implied: Firstly, that moral facts and moral changes are entirely real<sup>1</sup>. Secondly, that individuals may experience these real moral facts and changes. Thirdly, that the way these facts and changes are experienced is dependent on the moral nature of the experiencer.(i.e. his or her conscience), and fourthly, that the moral nature of the experiencer can be changed, and known to be changed, by the direct operation of God. All of these implications are embraced by Forsyth and are explored in his works.

These four are clearly metaphysical statements, and they are by no means trivial, or intuitively obvious. They are in fact profoundly out of tune with much contemporary western philosophical thought. In Forsyth's day the first and second of these metaphysical statements would have been relatively unremarkable, and could probably have been left in the rather shorthand form in which I have presented them above. Eighty years on they need rather more extended treatment if they are not to appear simply philosophically naive. The third and fourth of these statements are more obviously within the domain of religious thought, and their relationship with the philosophical and metaphysical foundations of the

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1. Forsyth regards a full understanding of the reality of the moral as, at least in one perspective, the implications of Neo-Kantianism "raised to the Christian temperature". *The Principle of Authority*, Pgs. 202-3. Rodgers (*The Theology of P.T. Forsyth*, London, Independent Press, 1965) indicates (Pg. 273) that the difference between Forsyth and the Neo-Kantians lay in his refusal to identify the Holy with the Moral Law, but to seek for a relational understanding.

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first two, will also need some exposition.

Why does Forsyth work with a pattern of thought in which moral facts and moral changes are entirely real? The strongest internal reason for this, of course, is that unless moral changes are changes in the way things really are, the alteration in the conscience, an entity with solely moral significance, would be relatively unimportant. In a voluntarist understanding of moral value, for example, where the whole realm of values arises from the will of particular valuing entities, the decision to change from one value structure to another would have no more inherent significance than the decision to change from the imperial to the metric system of measurements. If this were one's understanding of moral facts and changes, the evangelical experience of the redemption of the conscience could hardly be regarded as of the first importance except within a particular voluntarily adopted value structure. The claim to authority and to a better understanding of the nature of reality that accompany the evangelical experience could only be regarded as illusory.

Why does Forsyth maintain that individuals may experience these real moral facts and changes? There may seem to be a certain absurdity, after swallowing the camel of the metaphysical reality of moral facts and moral changes, to strain the gnat of our ability to experience those moral facts and changes. However, Forsyth believes that there is a thoroughly metaphysical means of understanding the basic change in human nature that is associated with God's grace, but which does not allow



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that change to be directly experienced by the believer. This he considers to be the case with the traditional "propositional" metaphysics of the Catholic and Anglican Churches. This approach, Forsyth believes, construes the salvation of humanity in terms of the divinisation of the human substance<sup>1</sup>. For example, if the change wrought by faith in Christians is construed in a way that is analogous to traditional catholic understandings of the change wrought in the bread and the wine at the Eucharist, you have, in one sense, a powerful synthesis of a metaphysical understanding of the world, and a metaphysical understanding of God's grace.

But Forsyth considers it to be fundamentally flawed. While the integration<sup>of</sup> a doctrine of salvation and a metaphysics it represents is something that Forsyth welcomes, and is indeed attempting to reproduce in his own work, he maintains that this particular scheme, in its current usage, is vicious and morally debilitating. Because human beings cannot experience reality in terms of the traditional metaphysics, the effect of this metaphysics is to separate the fact of salvation from the experience of salvation.

In this way the crucial evangelical experience becomes a weak and untrustworthy analogue of a reality, and not the heart of the reality. Similarly a real moral change in the conscience, that could not actually be experienced, would not only be a logical monstrosity, but an

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.85-87.

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essentially debilitating conception.

Why does Forsyth maintain that the way these facts and changes are experienced is dependent on the moral nature of the experiencer.(i.e. his conscience)? This point perhaps requires more extended explanation. One of the very distinctive things about Forsyth's metaphysics is his understanding of the significance of the moral status of the individual for his or her capacity to perceive the moral nature of reality. It is in this area that Forsyth seems to depart most radically from the British philosophical tradition, if that is understood solely in terms of British empiricism.

"Morality is the nature of things" <sup>1</sup>. The fact/value distinction, with the former very much in the ascendant, is, for most purposes so deeply rooted in our thought that it takes considerable effort to remember that, little over seventy years ago, facts appeared less real to some British philosophers than values, and idealism substantially dominated British academic philosophy<sup>2</sup>.

Forsyth's was a moral idealism. That means he carried with him into his understanding of reality as moral themes and patterns of thought that arose in the first instance within idealist, rather than moral, thought.

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.202.

2. John H. Rodger's *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth* London, Independent Press, 1965, points out that the turn of the century was rather a low point for British empiricism. The securities of Newtonian physics were on their way out, and determinism was no longer credible. (Pgs 266&267)

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This can be shown as follows.

Philosophical idealism may be understood as arising fundamentally from a dissatisfaction with the solutions offered by empiricists to the question, "How do we come by an understanding of the world as basically enduring and stable, when our sense experience of it is fragmentary, and constantly interrupted and changing?". I look at the tree outside the window, I look away from the tree, and yet I am entirely persuaded that the tree is still there if I should care to look at it again.

The Idealist "solutions" to this problem cover a fairly wide range of thought. What they have in common with each other, however, is a persuasion that the things that are present to the mind are not best thought of as *sense perceptions*, with a nature arising more or less completely from the nature of non-mental, material objects. For an idealist the things that present themselves to the mind are *ideas*, with a nature arising, more or less, from the nature of the minds to which they are present. A radical idealist would deny that it makes any sense to imagine that there are any things, apart from those things which are present to minds, or that those things have any nature or property apart from such mind-perceptions. Kantian and Hegelian idealisms allow more separation between minds and things than this.

British idealism was self consciously moderate, allowing more reality to things apart from their immediate perception by individual minds, and attempting, in various ways, to take a middle course between what might

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be called a "copy theory" of the relationship between perception and reality, on the one hand, and radical idealism on the other.

Forsyth was probably not directly interested in this particular riddle, from a philosophical point of view. He had, however, studied in Germany, was well versed in continental Theology, and was deeply concerned with the relationship between his thought and that of Hegel, and his successors<sup>1</sup>. He espouses a brand of British idealism, personal idealism, in Metaphysic and Redemption<sup>2</sup>, and he mentions in his bibliography a work by a personal idealist, *Realm of Ends* by James Ward.

I have quoted above the assertion that the nature of things is moral. A pure empiricist, if he found himself committed to such a doctrine, would presumably have to assert that the moral nature of things presented itself to the mind at least as a quasi sense perception. For an idealist, however, the mind can be thought of as supplying or determining vital elements of the way the world is understood, and the fashion in which it supplies or determines those elements is a very important explanation of the possibility both of understanding, and of error. What the mind does in constructing, or misconstruing of reality (as, for example, Euclidian with duration) the conscience does for the

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1. Bradley (*P.T. Forsyth, the Man and his work*, London, Independent Press, 1952) gives a useful quotation from *The place of spiritual experience in the making of theology*. (*The Christian World Pulpit*, March 21, 1906). Forsyth sets out clearly his relationship to Scheiermacher and Ritschl. He maintains that he favours not a theology of experience, but a theology that makes its appeal to experience.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.60.

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construction or misconstruction of reality as moral.

It is important to realise that neither Forsyth, nor the British idealists would regard such construction as a purely elective proceeding. A particular picture or set of ideas of the world does not gain its validity from the subscription of the individual who has that picture or set of ideas. This is clearly apparent when one comes to consider common sense geometry. However one interprets the relationship between the mind and the ideas of space which are present to it, there is no sense in imagining that you can simply determine that two lines of six inches will together add up to ten inches. Any practical experiment will make it clear that this is not so.

The corresponding point about values and the conscience, which Forsyth, no less than his teacher Ritschl<sup>1</sup>, would maintain, is perhaps not so intuitively obvious. When the conscience presents aspects of reality to the mind as good, or bad, it is making a judgment about a fact, not expressing an individual preference<sup>2</sup>.

Some sense of the solidity and "realness" which Forsyth attributes to the realm of values can be gained by considering the fact that he finds

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1. Bradley, (Op.Cit Pg. 103) believes Forsyth drew on Ritschl particularly for his moral interest.

2. Gwylim O. Griffith *The Theology of P.T. Forsyth* London, Lutterworth Press, 1948, traces a line from Schleiermacher through Ritschl to Forsyth. In particular he emphasises the way that Forsyth took on board Ritschl's project of providing a less subjective way of refounding the Christian faith in experience. (Pgs 1-16)

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it necessary, later in the book, to defend his understanding of the place of conscience in history from the charge that it represents a version, in the moral sphere, of philosophical pragmatism<sup>1</sup>. The nature of things is moral, and to misunderstand their moral nature is to court disaster no less than to misunderstand their physical aspects. It might have been easy for hostile minds to draw out parallels between this position, and a putative pragmatist one, where the meaning or truth of a value statement could be determined by the way that adhering to it did or did not "work" for the individual, in the sense of enabling him to fulfil his projects.

The redemption of the conscience, thus understood, makes, quite literally, the greatest possible difference to the individual, and his relationship with reality. Indeed the redemption of the conscience simply is the correct ordering of the individual in relation to reality as moral. By a process which Forsyth sees as intimately connected with the Cross, the individual perceives, or constructs, the moral nature of reality and of himself as they indeed are, and comes to order his actions correctly in the light of this reality.

Why does Forsyth work with a pattern of thought in which the moral nature of the experiencer can be changed, and known to be changed, by the direct operation of God? A moral idealism could work solely with the everyday patterns of moral causation, where the evil and good that I do

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1. *The Justification of God* Pg.208.

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and see, in conjunction with the ordinary operation of my will and understanding, determine my moral nature, and to that extent determine my future moral experience. A world construed in idealist terms , and even in moral idealist terms, can be "causally closed" no less than a world that is construed in terms of more familiar metaphysics. To opt for a metaphysics of moral idealism does not, as such, make space for God.

A causally closed metaphysic of moral idealism, however would not make any place for the experience of salvation for which Forsyth is trying to make a metaphysical structure<sup>1</sup>. The evangelical experience of salvation precisely is the experience of change which is recognisable because the person undergoing the change knows that it lies outside the ordinary pattern of moral causation. He knows that even the full discovery by the conscience of the extent of the guilt that the person bears would not bring about the change that has been brought about. The conscience can only reconstruct the nature of the moral reality of the person in the sense of enabling a full understanding, not in the sense of changing the reality, or at least not this radically. The reality has been changed, and various things make it clear that this change is connected with God and the Cross<sup>2</sup>.

It should be clear by now that Forsyth's metaphysics is highly inductive

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1. *The Principle of Authority*. Pg.27

2. *The Justification of God* Pg. 13.

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in character. He is not trying to build a metaphysical structure from a handful of exceedingly general and practically undeniable propositions, by deduction. On the contrary, he is trying to give intellectual form to, and tease out the implications of a very specific experience, or group of experiences. That his own conscience, and those of many others have been remade according to God's conscience, and thereby attuned to the deepest nature of reality, is the starting point. What else must be true about reality for this thing to have occurred, is a topic that makes reference to metaphysics necessary. There is probably no need for Forsyth to do more than offer a sketch to suggest that this can be achieved in a fashion which is intellectually respectable.

What is the status of this metaphysics in Forsyth's thought? When Forsyth writes *We have passed beyond a metaphysic of mere rarefied substance for...totality, what might be called the metaphysic of obvious and amateur pantheism*<sup>1</sup>, he is at least in part talking about the drive of intellectual history, as he understands it, since the enlightenment. The metaphysics to which he believes we have passed is a convergence of thought. It is the implication of the passage from Hegelianism to Neo-Kantianism and beyond <sup>2</sup>. It is the natural direction for Pessimistic Monism to take if it is seeking a real security of *telos* <sup>3</sup>. It is an

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.59.

2. *The Principle of Authority*, p.201-205.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.56-66.



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implication of the *closer and more scientific treatment of History*<sup>1</sup>.

Forsyth is a believer in intellectual progress. There is, in metaphysics at least, work that has been done which does not need to be done anew. Positions which it was once appropriate to hold are no longer tenable<sup>2</sup>. But the thing that drives intellectual progress is reflection on experience, and it is the inevitable implications of experience that form the real case for Forsyth's metaphysic.

What we have passed to when we have passed beyond *what might be called the metaphysic of obvious and amateur pantheism*<sup>3</sup> is a metaphysic of energy, and we are drawn in the end to personal idealism, a metaphysic of moral energy. *This is the kind of energy of which we are most conscious, the only kind we truly and intimately realise--the energy of ourselves--the energy we are..* Therefore ...we construe the universe in terms of its crowning product, soul, conscience and society<sup>4</sup>.

There is implicit in this approach a criticism of the claims to a non-personal objectivity that might in principle be opposed to this personal "subjectivity". *In his experience of nature (including psychic nature) a man never gets out of the sphere of subjectivity. Science, with its*

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.48.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.86.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.59.

4. *The Justification of God*, p.60.

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*boasted objectivity is sheerly subjective. The experience it handles is founded in our notions of space and time, which are subjective contributions<sup>1</sup>.*

It would be fair to say, however, that this metaphysic is a *priori* at least to the discussion of theodicy. It must be marked down as one of Forsyth's assumptions, which would have caused less remark at the time of his writing than it might arouse if he were publishing in the present. Forsyth does not seriously argue for it, but only within it.

That his metaphysic is a matter of allusion rather than system is not something that would trouble Forsyth greatly. It is in line with the sense that it is the experience underlying the thinking that is of ultimate importance, however valuable and necessary the thinking is. *We cannot wait to believe in Christ till a due examination of the religious psychology of the race, or of the metaphysic behind it, gives us leave; till we are convinced that Christ does not wound the general and fundamental principles of racial religion* <sup>2</sup>. It is, as we shall see, on the basis of morality and will, and not on the basis of rationality and intellect that Forsyth advances his case for the understanding of theodicy. The metaphysics is explanatory and not constitutive. It is a way of setting forth the truth, rather than of discovering it.

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.171.

2. *The Principle of Authority*, p.198.

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by clarifying the reasoning behind, the feature of Forsyth's theodicy upon which he himself lays the most emphasis, and which, in relation to other theodicies, is most characteristic. This is the point that the problem which theodicy addresses is not "How can a loving God permit so much suffering in his creation?". The problem theodicy addresses is "How can God admit reconciliation between himself and sinful man?"<sup>1</sup>.

This second question is one that has been present, if at all, only as a sub-theme of traditional theodicy. In the context of a metaphysics in which the moral nature of a person is the most real thing about him, however, it should be clear that this second question becomes far more acute. God is working within a structure, no doubt of his own creation, but morally intractable. Where one more convinced by the reality and causal closedness of the material order would be concerned about the possibility of physical miracle, Forsyth is seeking to account for what, within his metaphysical structure, amounts to a moral miracle.

It is significant, in this context, to realise that there can be no kind of "Justification by Legal Fiction" atonement for Forsyth. The work of God in justifying the individual is not a matter of ascribing a *status* to him, but a matter of causing, by moral means, that the individual shall approach that status. Again a physical analogy springs to mind. It makes no more sense under Forsyth's understanding of metaphysics for God to ascribe righteousness to an individual than it does for him to

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.173.

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ascribe squareness to a circle.

There is another indication in the metaphysical aspect of Forsyth's thought why it is not the innocent suffering of human beings that is the fundamental difficulty. The emphasis on moral action, rather than suffering, and the emphasis on the interplay of moral entities rather than physical ones shifts the point of tension away from the physical. Seen through a moral metaphysic physical ills have an insubstantiality that makes them seem very susceptible to moral redress. The sum of Forsyth's discussion of the matter seems to be that such suffering is known to be capable of redemption, that Christ has known the full reality of such suffering and was able to glorify God while undergoing it<sup>1</sup>, and that the time will come when creation will look back on the path that it has taken and be able to say that it would be willing to go through it again, to be able to serve God with such praise<sup>2</sup>.

If Forsyth's metaphysical position eases the problem of evil in relation to human suffering, it correspondingly sharpens the difficulties posed by moral evil. This point can be made most clearly by reference to Forsyth's understanding of the implications of his metaphysics for the understanding of history. In fact, for Forsyth the "Problem of Evil", at least from the perspective of the Great War, is a problem about the metaphysical nature of History.

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1. *The Justification of God* P. 127-8.

2. *The Justification of God* P.129

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In 1913 Forsyth published *The Principle of Authority*, a less passionate, and in some ways more systematic work than *The Justification of God*. In it Forsyth defines two approaches to the understanding of history<sup>1</sup>, induction and valuation. Essentially he seems to be suggesting that the attempt to undertake a value-free presentation of History, one which *Spreads before us the whole historic field as an area of induction*<sup>2</sup> has some virtue as long as it does not take its claims to be scientific too seriously. But, because there must be some principle for selection, there will an inevitable begging of the question of the fundamental nature of the historical process, by the assumption of the constitutive importance of, for example, freedom, culture, or spirituality.

The approach to history that is of decisive worth, he maintains, is the approach of valuation. It starts from the idea expressed in Kant's axiom at the outset of his metaphysic of Ethic "There is nothing conceivable in the world, or out of it, which can be called good without qualification except a good Will"<sup>3</sup>. Working from this point, it searches for the presence of Will in all history.

This emphasis on the centrality of the will in our understanding of History is not to be thought of as restricting the domain of historical interest to the effects of human wills upon one another. On the

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.223-226.

2. *The Principle of Authority*, p.225.

3. *The Principle of Authority*, p.226.



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contrary, at least one of its implications is to encourage the understanding of the effects of the material world upon history in terms of the operation of will. *And the miracles of Christ show that His work is not simply to empower the soul to rise over an inferior creation and beat down Nature under its feet, but that it is also to involve Nature in the grand co-operation of all things in the everlasting kingdom*<sup>1</sup>.

Forsyth seems to be closing off the possibility of the traditional separation of "moral evil" and "physical evil". In a personalist metaphysics, it does not make very much sense to approach some suffering as the result of impersonal regularities in creation.

We shall find also, when we come to consider *The Justification of God* directly, that Forsyth also takes history to be the domain of the active intervention of God. Whatever answer he might propose to the questions raised by, for example, the Great War, the option was never open to him of setting it aside as an unfortunate accident, or even as solely the natural effect of human beings' evil use of their freedom.

### 2.3 A Personalising Enterprise

I have said enough, I hope, to demonstrate that Forsyth is a thoroughly metaphysical thinker, and that we are bound to be mystified by his thought unless we approach it in this light. A crucial element in that metaphysics, however, is the metaphysical understanding of the person.

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.232.

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If we have followed Forsyth as he asks "What must reality be like for the evangelical experience of redemption to be so crucial?" we must go on to ask "What must Persons be like for the evangelical experience of redemption to be what Forsyth takes it to be?" The evangelical experience of redemption is construed by Forsyth, in terms of his metaphysics, as the operation of the Eternal God upon the Conscience. It is something that happens in Time, and brings about a change of Will. In order to make sense of this we must attempt something Forsyth himself neglected: A fairly systematic Forsythian account of the nature of person.

The discussion of Forsyth's metaphysics, in which we have just been engaged, provides a satisfactory jumping off point for the discussion of his understanding of the nature of persons. In particular, it enables us to understand the importance of the place of the conscience. In a moral metaphysic, the conscience simply is the point of contact between personal natures, and the most fundamental nature of reality. The moral reality of creation, as it really is in itself, rather than as it appears to individuals, is God's conscience. What in ourselves is a "faculty" reconstructing the reality we experience in moral terms is in God his very nature, and makes the moral texture of the universe.

Forsyth combines his idealism with no hint of moral relativism. The human conscience is capable of error. Human moral judgments may be sincere, consistent, effective and yet wrong. This possibility of error enables us to indicate that, for Forsyth, there are in principle three

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possible basic states for the human conscience to be in. It can be in a state of guilt. It can be in a state of blindness, and it can be in its natural or recreated state.

A conscience is in a state of guilt when it has sensed the tension between the different parts of its reconstruction of reality, and registered the incoherence of its moral action that results. It must be stressed that Forsyth's understanding of the conscience is not one under which the injunction "Whatever you do, be true to your own conscience" would make any sense. It is not possible, in fact, to act in a way that is untrue to one's conscience. Every deed is an expression in action of the current state of the conscience of the person who acts. If I drive while drunk, having condemned this vice in others, then I demonstrate the incoherence of my conscience rather than my failure to heed it.

A blind conscience may be thought of as one which is consistently wrong. Most cultures contain elements that arise from our third category, recreated consciences, and the individuals brought up in those cultures become aware of the wrongness of their consciences because there is a visible tension between these good elements and the reality of their lives. Under exceptional circumstances, however, it is possible for the moral realities of the world to sink so far out of sight in a culture that the sense of guilt itself disappears. Forsyth would regard the moral culture of his own period as having, in some cases, achieved that lamentable completeness, consciences that are consistently wrong.



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Having come thus far, the recreated conscience will perhaps need little glossing. It is a conscience that is consistently right in its judgments, and understanding of the moral realities, because it has been remade in accordance with God's conscience.

The individual soul is composed fundamentally of conscience and will. The conscience is the deepest nature of the person, a point that can be fully grasped only in the light of the metaphysic of personal idealism, and the assertion that the nature of things is moral.

The will can probably best be understood as the expression of conscience in time, and in action. A conscience without a will would be inconceivable, since moral action lies at the heart of reality. For the same reason a will without a conscience is an incoherent notion. Each is impotent to the point of non-existence without the other.

If one can imagine such a thing as an inventory of the contents of the conscience, as Forsyth conceives it, one would find that the contents, except in the case of the sanctified elect, and the self-satisfied and blind, are a diversity. It is an entity with a tendency to radical incoherence. There are, in Forsyth's view, two things that are characteristic of the conscience which may be thought of not as part of the inventory of its contents, but as part of the ground of its nature. Whatever the incoherence of the conscience it has 1) a sense of its own unity, and 2) a sense of existing in a moral domain, one in which there is such a thing as moral responsibility from which it is incapable of

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dissociating itself.

*The soul is a whole, a unity. The very pain of our inner strife witnesses to that. It is the only unity we seem directly to know<sup>1</sup>.*

*The root of conscience is our sense of responsibility, our sense of being trustees and subjects-i.e. our sense of divine power and majesty over us. We are not here for freedom but for responsibility<sup>2</sup>.*

It is against the background of this sense of unity and responsibility that the division and guilt of the conscience are to be understood. Doing what is wrong may be entirely in accord with what we have called the contents of the conscience, but it is not in accordance with what we may think of as its fundamental nature. It will hardly surprise us therefore that the reorientation of the conscience involves the reordering of the conscience so that it can express its fundamental nature in practice, in unity and in responsibility before God.

The process by which this is achieved, in Forsyth's view, is by the activity of God, through Christ within the soul. *In Christ God is not preached but present, and not only kind but mighty, not only willing but initiative, creative. He does more than justify faith, He creates it. It is His more than ours. We believe because He makes us believe-with moral*

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.41.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.13.

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*compulsion, an invasion and capture of us. He becomes our eternal life*<sup>1</sup>.

To use a biblical image, the work of God in Christ on the conscience is like the leaven in the lump, steadily working for its re-creation in a new form. Forsyth's argument depends upon its being possible to say that God is directly acting upon the conscience in a way that is fully in accordance with its nature, and yet quite beyond its capacities to act upon itself.

I have suggested above that the relationship between the conscience and the will is fundamentally one of the time perspective from which they are viewed. This point may perhaps be sharpened by reference to Forsyth's description of human personality as *eternity in a point*. Time passes. Its passing is indicated in the changes that take place. In order to make sense of this, however, in order to reconstruct the totality of experience in this way there must be a sense of a permanence. It is the inner identity through time of the experiencer that makes possible the outer experience of variation. When seen in this way it is not the eternity of the person that is strange, so much as the evanescent quality of time, or at least the ratio between this permanent self and fleeting time. In this light, Forsyth can say: *The Eternal becomes time without ceasing to be Eternity. The timeless becomes historic by a process which is at the root of all miracle*<sup>2</sup>.

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.44.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.46.

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Forsyth does not explain this reference to miracles, but he may have in mind something like this: The heart of a miracle, as that word is ordinarily understood is the imposition of the will upon reality in a way that does not usually occur. It would follow, to a certain extent, from what we have been saying above, that the meshing of the eternal reality of the self, and the passing reality of time which occurs whenever the self finds expression in will, is in its way a miracle profound enough to render what we ordinarily call miracle less obviously unique.

If the will is the expression of the conscience in time, what is the relationship between the will and History? The end to which History tends is the blending of will with will. In the end the unity of humanity will be found in the harmonising of all wills around the will of God<sup>1</sup>. In this sense one may say that the individual person not merely is an end, so far as God is concerned, but has an end. Clearly, given the indissolubility of will and conscience it is inevitable that the blending of will with will in harmony with the will of God involves a re-orientation of the conscience as well.

What is this reorientation, and how is it brought about? A distinctive element in Forsyth's understanding of the operation of Christ upon the conscience is that it takes the form of judgment. *It is certainly not by atomic acts that we are judged, nor by their balance tested by a mere*

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.74.

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*law. The ultimate, the fundamental, judgment is an adjustment of persons - God's and man's. It is not between a soul and a law. It is a judgment of our faith and its personal relation to the true Christian, rather than our works, which are the fruit of that relation. Lip confession of Christ is nothing; but soul confession, life confession there must be. The great judgment is not upon works, but upon the standing life-act which practically and eternally disposes of the person<sup>1</sup>.*

We have therefore a picture of the personhood as, in one light, an eternal conscience, and in another, a moral will expressed in time. Even when presented this simply it is possible to see an element in Forsyth's thought which is central to any attempt to understand what he is saying. This may be described as a tension between tenses. In the paragraph I have just quoted, Judgment has its aspect at once of a single act, of a summation of a whole life, and of a disposition for eternity. This is true not only for the judgment of the individual, but for the judgment from which that judgment stems, the judgment of the whole that is found in the Cross.

Forsyth explicitly identifies the invasive power of God in Christ with God's saving judgment. It is not by some means alien to the nature of the person, by a kind of spiritual lobotomy that God brings about the change or reorientation of the conscience. The fundamental currency of the relationship between God and humanity is moral, i.e. the currency of

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.187-8.

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the conscience. This relationship, and indeed all relations between persons, will have these aspects, at least so far as their morality goes, of the present instant, the life-time act, and the eternal expression. This may perhaps be most clear in the place of judgment as a relational element between God and man, but it must pervade all the other relations as well.

Forsyth ties this paradox of tense in the personality to another, which we may call the paradox of unity.

*We come to ourselves in the soul-certainty of faith, which believes that the world is the work, the end, and the trophy of a perfectly Holy God, and that it is therefore for him already perfect in his Son, it is already a saved whole. And in the same act and paradox of faith, we know that our souls, though so deeply involved in the vast world, are at the same time also microcosmic wholes. They are involved in it in such a way as still to be ends in their social selves, and not merely means to a social whole. We seize the paradox, so vital to religious experience, of a Whole of wholes, a paradox which can be expounded by a philosophy of personality, with its unique power of interpenetration, mutual involution, and reciprocal indwelling<sup>1</sup>.*

A Whole of wholes, is of course the vision of will blent with will, or of the human race finding its unity in the conscience re-created by God

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.50.

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which Forsyth holds up as a vision of the end towards which God's purposing in the world tends. It is perhaps reasonable to see in the paradox of unity a reflection of the two elements that we identified earlier in the fundamental nature of the conscience, the sense on the one hand of a unity in principle within the individual conscience, against which the division and distress that is found in fact is an offence, and the sense of a responsibility before God. We have our own particular unity in our consciences, but also our common relationship with the majesty of God, which are each to find a complete expression in eternity.

These two paradoxes complete what I am presenting as Forsyth's account of personal nature. If Forsyth is looking for a metaphysical, personal, experiential, certainty, in the light of the evangelical experience of redemption, and in the face of the experience of evil, then we should now be a little closer to understanding what the "personal" element in that might amount to. It must be a certainty that relates to the conscience as an eternal moral entity, and the will as its expression in time. It must be a certainty that bears on Conscience's experience of itself as radically incoherent, but ultimately grounded in unity. The Unity to which the certainty must tend, is a unity both of the individual, and of the race, a whole race, composed of whole persons.

### 2.4 An Experiential Enterprise

In the light of this understanding of the personal element in Forsyth's

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thought, we are in a position to consider his emphasis on the importance of experience. Forsyth maintains strongly that the really important point of reference for any account of the nature of the person is our own actual experience of our own lives. He acknowledges the intellectual pressures that inclined some of his contemporaries to find other theoretical bases for their understandings of the person, but he is determined to resist them. *The temptation is strong for many to-day to construe life on a scheme of evolution borrowed from the natural world, and passing through the normal points of birth, bloom and death. But we are arrested in this scheme by several facts when we are dealing with personal life. For instance, the beginning of that life is not with birth, but with the first exercise of the soul in an act of free choice. Then its development does not lie in natural process, but in a series of such acts of choice, in which the personality asserts itself against the processes that would but hurry it, as a thing, down a stream. Its culmination, again, is not mere blossom, it is not in the easy, unconscious play of forces, but in the deliberate harmony of the self-asserting will with an ideal conceived, pursued and more or less attained. And finally, death is not simply failure as blameless decay, but it is bound up with a failure with which we charge ourselves; and our best life is a gift in the midst of such failure, a gift of mercy forgiveness, redemption, eternity*<sup>1</sup>.

In this passage Forsyth sets his face against a way of understanding

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.45.



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life that depends upon evolutionary theory. It is not scientific evolution of the Darwinian variety that he is seeking to reject. It is the uncritical adoption of Darwinian categories in the understanding of individual and collective personal life that is the problem. He rejects this on two grounds. The first, which is not directly relevant to the question of the nature of the personal, is that it has comfortably been assumed by the people to whom this view of life and history has seemed attractive, that the period of serious and unpleasant struggle has come to an end, and that all that is left is for the good that has grown, with God's assistance, out of the struggle for the survival of the fittest, by God's grace to be spread more widely<sup>1</sup>.

The second, and for our purposes more significant, is that it is not possible for us to experience our life in the way that the evolutionary scheme indicates to be appropriate. The evolutionary understanding of the place of the individual, and his contribution to history, is a radically externalised one. No doubt there is struggle, but it is not moral struggle, and it is not struggle of the will. By fulfilling his nature, and either flourishing or failing to flourish, the individual brings reality forward in the way that God wills. A sufficient number of successful (divinely assisted) fulfillings of natures brings culture to the point where the Incarnation can occur in a context that will make it effective for the speedy progress of the whole to (presumably) the eternal survival of the eternally fit.

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.163-4.

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This, Forsyth argues, is not something that we can actually believe to be the truth about our nature. The fact is that we experience our own lives not in terms of birth, flourishing and blameless decay, but in terms of the exercise of choice, and the final decay of that power of choice. The evolutionary scheme, in short, pays insufficient attention to the primacy of the will in making choices, and thus betrays itself as an inadequate way of looking at the world.

Forsyth is characteristically wholehearted about his understanding of the primacy of the will in this context. Sin and death are linked in the most direct possible way. *And finally, death is not simply failure as blameless decay, but it is bound up with a failure with which we charge ourselves;* It is tempting to believe that Forsyth is talking here about what we might call "death in life", or "the living death of sin". The context makes it clear that he is talking about the fact of death, which stands behind such metaphorical usage. It is an eloquent testimony to the centrality of the notion of persons as moral entities in Forsyth's thought, that he can present physical death as the consequence of sin.

It is not merely against the evolutionist that Forsyth seeks to defend the centrality of the person. The evolutionary pattern of thought is a form of mechanism that degrades the human experience of freedom and choice, but so also, in a different way, is the Hegelian. In defining himself as a personal idealist Forsyth has in part made it clear that he finds the absolutist idealist approaches to the understanding of the personal inadequate.

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*This is a line of thought which is forced upon us as soon as we begin to give the individual his due value in the system of things or ideas. The ideal construction of history, which came to a head in the impressive architecture of Hegelianism, fell and broke on the new sense in the nineteenth century of the value of the individual. And not only his value in the sense of his preciousness, but in the sense of his power, the sense of him as a creative, invasive, deflective, incalculable power<sup>1</sup>.*

The insistence in relation both to Evolution and to History, is upon the same thing. It is the individual's experience of self. In the first instance it is the experience of self as an entity having choice, and in the second instance as an entity whose understanding of history must be based upon his own sense of an inner something enduring through time, and finding ever wider expression.

### 2.5 Certainty in Forsyth's Enterprise

It is perhaps easier to insist that the evangelical experience of redemption should have the qualities of being personal, and experiential, than to insist that it should have the quality of a certainty. How does Forsyth believe we can make the move from an Experience to a Certainty, and what role does our experience of evil

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.47.

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have in this move? What kind of thing does Forsyth think we can know? It is important to notice that when the perspective of the believing subject is combined with a moral and personalising metaphysic, in the way that Forsyth sketches, knowledge becomes a very different thing. It would be fair to say that for most ordinary discussions we take our *knowledge of objects* as the paradigmatic form of knowledge. Things we can touch, taste, see and talk to other people about, public objects, are the things we feel we really know about.

The paradigm of knowledge with which Forsyth approaches his experience, however, is our knowledge of persons, both other persons, and ourselves. This is necessarily subjective, in the sense that we know even other persons not as objects completely external to us, but as beings with whom we are in a relationship. Knowledge is not, on this understanding, a passive effect in us of an impression made by an external object. It is not even an effect in us produced by the active investigation of a passive object. It is a consequence of an active relationship, characteristically of an active relationship between persons. Real facts are active facts, facts-in-relation.

Real facts are also moral facts, for Forsyth. The knowledge of how we stand in relation to other persons is moral knowledge, and this kind of knowledge is more central, more secure, more real, on Forsyth's understanding, than any other kind of knowledge.

I am afraid that this rather abstract presentation of a completely

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different paradigm of knowledge is bound, in itself, to seem rather baffling. A more detailed exposition would probably be more baffling still, since without the central intuition, the ramifications can only seem arbitrary. I suspect that the best way I can make sense of the kind of knowledge Forsyth is talking about is impressionistically.

At moments of heightened religious sensibility many people have a sense of the whole world as saturated with meaning. Sticks and stones, music and painting seem less like objects than usual, and more resonant with the personhood of God. One may have a heightened awareness of other persons as persons, a wonder at how nearly like objects we sometimes treat them. The moral realities of a world in travail, full of love and evil, can seem very raw and present. The way the world is can seem to cry out, not for external understanding, but for an act of will, or an act of commitment.

I believe it is this "mood", or intuition, which Forsyth is attempting to capture as a correct perception of the true fundamental nature of things. He is attempting to grasp the possibility of a world in which contours of what one might call "noumenal reality" are normative. Forsyth's personalising metaphysics, and his paradigm of knowledge seem much more attractive in this context than they might in the cold light of day.

How does Forsyth understand the link between experience and certainty? We have, perhaps, discovered the domain of the evangelical experience of

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redemption. What would it mean, in this context, for an experience to be certain?

Certainty must surely be at least part of the quality of the experience itself. In an approach in which the perspective of the believing subject is sovereign, it would be idle to attempt to construct a certainty "objectively" if no subjective certainty were there.

It would be wrong, however, to overemphasise this point. We must not confuse the certainty of the evangelical experience of redemption, with its vividness, its suddenness, or its immediate effect upon individuals. To do so would be to exclude from the range of discussion those of us for whom redemption is gradually appropriated rather than immediately wrought. Forsyth is not the kind of evangelical who wishes to deny the faith of those whose conversion was less spectacular than those of Paul, Augustine or Luther<sup>1</sup>.

And indeed, even if we had all been converted in a spectacular moment, it would still not be right to place all the emphasis on the quality of the experience. Forsyth goes to some lengths to show that the sovereignty of the believing subject is not the same thing as the sovereignty of subjectivity. While he is unwilling to abandon the perspective of the believing subject, he is perfectly well aware that "I am certain" is hardly an argument, nor yet a very good basis for a life

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.467-8.

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of faith. The "cold light of day" will creep up on a certainty that is purely subjective.

*Certainty, I have said, must always be subjective in one sense--in the sense that it is for the subject that it is certain....For any fruitful purpose we must go beyond, "I am certain"; we must reach, "It is certain".... My sureness contains something which should insure yours. Otherwise we cannot pass beyond the region of mere mystic impression and unstable opinion<sup>1</sup>.*

We must now look at the ways in which Forsyth presents the movement outwards from "I am certain" to "It is certain". We shall find that it is a movement outwards in two different directions. Our awareness of evil is crucial to the move in one direction, and a considerable barrier to the movement in the other.

Knowledge, or at least religious knowledge, is understood by Forsyth to be available only from the perspective of the believing subject. There is an obvious danger that the "perspective of the believing subject" may in fact be a self indulgent subjectivity. How can we be sure that we are not simply indulging an illusion? Where another pattern of thought would seek to avoid the charge of subjectivity by emphasising the close relationship between knowledge and the object that is known, (by seeking to be "objective"), Forsyth employs an entirely different strategy. It

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.90.

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is the subject, rather than the object, that is authoritative in knowledge. The only way to a greater authority, therefore, is in a greater subject.

*The authority for our thought is not more thought. ... Our thought and its laws reflect His thought, It is not a matter simply of affinity and intellectual love, but of difference, and of intellectual fear, rising from the limitation of our thought and not its absoluteness. We have no absolute knowledge. We have but a knowledge that we are absolutely known, and therefore a complete trust. We do not deify, we do not idolise Humanity as the ideal become personal in multitude. We, and all being, are thought, are known, are loved, by an infinite Lover of Souls. A theory of knowledge must start with the prime knowledge, the knowledge that we are known<sup>1</sup>.*

*In religious knowledge the object is God; it is not the world, it is not man. And that object differs from every other in being for us far more than an object of knowledge. He is the absolute subject of it. He is not something that we approach, with the initiative on our side, He takes the initiative and approaches us. Our knowledge is the result of His revelation. We find Him because He first finds us. That is to say, the main thing, the unique thing, in religion is not a God Whom we know, but a God Who knows us. Religion turns not on knowing but on being known<sup>2</sup>.*

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.111.

2. *The Principle of Authority*, p.167.



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If one takes knowledge of public external objects as the paradigm of knowledge, then Forsyth's concept of finding a guarantee of our knowledge in the fact that we are known, can only seem paradoxical. It is bound to seem as though Forsyth wants to underwrite one problematical kind of knowledge with a far more problematical kind.

It is important therefore, that we retain a grasp of the personalising metaphysical context of these ideas. For Forsyth, our knowledge of persons is paradigmatic. Knowledge of persons is essentially relational. The only conceivable route to a greater assurance as to the existence of a relationship between myself and God, if my awareness of my own part of the reciprocal relationship is not enough, must lie in an awareness of God's part in the relationship.

In ordinary interpersonal encounters, knowing that one is known is something that arises from perceiving the just, or well judged response of others to ourselves. If someone finishes your sentences for you, correctly, or buys you birthday presents that are exactly right, then you know that you are known.

In the evangelical experience of redemption, Forsyth maintains, we do have a sense of being in relation to a reality that has judged us and known us<sup>1</sup>. The difficulty is that an obvious prime candidate for this role is the self sitting in judgment upon the self. We know ourselves,

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.173-4.

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to some extent. What could be more natural than the assumption that "Knowing that we are known", like *deja vu*, is an illusion within our own cognitive processes?

Were the evangelical experience of redemption a matter of judgment and guilt only, it would be hard to refute this notion, and the attempt to transcend subjectivity would be doomed. There is, however, an active element in the experience, a sense of new life. This Forsyth finds to be so obviously beyond the scope of the powers of the individual, that it underwrites the Experience of Redemption as an experience of something outside ourselves.

*And if we know anything about our own soul at all we know that this new life does not rise out of our own interior, or spring from our own resources. We are not the cause of our new life, we know. We are not the creators of our own new career and destiny. We did not and could not forgive our own past, which was not sinned against own own (sic) soul merely or chiefly....The conscience, so swift to accuse, is powerless to forgive. Nor could we infuse new life into ourselves<sup>1</sup>.*

Clearly, in this attempt to move from "I am certain" to "It is certain", evil is an essential element. It is only by contrast with our essentially divided and warring nature that we can come to trust this

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.27.

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external authority, which brings us peace<sup>1</sup>.

*And the thing which guarantees the reality of the content in experience is this, that in so treating it, in treating it as real, we acquire our souls for life. At bottom, indeed, it is a miracle. .. It is not of ourselves--it is the gift and creation of God<sup>2</sup>.*

Without a strong sense of the reality of fallen human nature, it would not be possible to identify so securely the evangelical experience of redemption as an experience of God operating upon us. Without a strong sense of the reality of fallen human nature, the means by which we "acquire our souls for life" could not have the unique and identifiable quality that it has in Forsyth's thought. The driving force for Forsyth's conception of faith is the divide between fallen and redeemed nature, and evil is crucial as the base line, from which we come to understand the nature and work of God.

The other direction of movement from "I am certain" to "It is certain" picks up on one of our "common sense" assumptions about the nature of facts.

*But we are bound to believe, by the very nature of certainty, that every intelligence which is in our contact with the same fact must share our*

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.32.

2. *The Principle of Authority*, p.30.

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*certainty. If we came to think that with exactly the same relation to the same fact there could be a variety of opinion about it, then all certainty would collapse<sup>1</sup>.*

It would be wrong, however, to read this as the rather bland assertion that we find security in our certainty of the evangelical experience of redemption, in that we can be persuaded by others, and can persuade others of its reality. This element of intersubjectivity is indeed part of the answer that Forsyth proposes to the charge of subjectivity <sup>2</sup>. But it fails to address the particular difficulties created by Forsyth's high conception of the power experienced, and by his sense of facts as essentially active and in relation to the will, first of all, rather than the mind.

When Forsyth writes: *.., wherever we have certainty, we have the implicit conviction of its universality if it had its rights and conditions<sup>3</sup>*, he is not talking about the sureness of a scientist about an external fact, and the power of rational persuasion.

*Nothing but moral freedom can give us power to understand a moral greatness like Christ's; and in the end nothing can understand Him or His words but the moral freedom which is His own new creation in us....A*

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.92.

2. *The Principle of Authority*, p.26 &27-28.

3. *The Principle of Authority*, p.92.

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*true freedom works critically from him. It accepts His Word against our own judgment in obedience of intellect and not its sacrifice, and so wins the power of deeper and deeper insight into His wealth of originality* credo ut intelligam<sup>1</sup>.

We need to remember that Forsyth is talking about an experience of an active power. If one has a sense of an unstoppable moral power at work upon oneself, it is hard to see how one can avoid the implication that there should be such a power at work upon all people. The transition from "I am certain" to "It is certain" in this case becomes the transition from the sense of the evangelical experience of redemption as an individual experience of God working a miracle in the self, to a sense of it as a fragment of a greater work that is being done in all people.

In a pattern of thought where "facts" are external passive objects, it is possible to be secure in one's own certainties, despite the disagreement of other people, in the conviction that others have not really *looked* at those facts. In a pattern of thought where "facts" are active entities in relation to experiencing subjects, the question: "Why has this fact not grasped my neighbour, and the whole world?", becomes acute.

In order to move from "I am certain" to "It is certain", we have, on

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.332.

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Forsyth's understanding, to be able to move from "I am redeemed" to "All are (or shall be) redeemed". Given that it is by no means undeniable that God is visibly redeeming the whole world, there is a need for thought, to seek to understand God's way of redemption in the world. And in this connection, the greater the presence and power of evil in the world, the more difficult the transition from "I am certain" to "It is certain"

*The faith of a teleology in history protects us from the vagrancy of the soul which dogs the notion that things are but staggering on, or flitting upon chance winds over a trackless waste. (But...) Questions then come home about the connection of evil and suffering, sin and sorrow, grief and goodness. Then it is that the desire for a teleology quickens and deepens into a passion for a theodicy<sup>1</sup>.*

In a sense we have been talking so far about persons living within the domain of God's conscience, and discussing the effects of contact with God's conscience upon the human. But God himself is a person, and therefore composed of conscience finding expression through time in will. The realisation that there is a teleology in the world is, in Forsyth's understanding, the realisation that this will is working through time in the world. When this is sharpened to a demonstration that God's will is working with complete assurance and certainty towards its goal, and that we can be completely sure about his achievement of

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.122.

## THE CROSS IN TIME

that goal, then we have what he would consider to be a theodicy.

It may seem to us that Forsyth is, in a sense asking too much in seeking that there should be a discernible teleology in the world. It would probably not be overstating the case to suggest that a certain amount of spiritual vagrancy is currently felt to be part of the human condition, a necessary element in human authenticity.

This charge is perhaps partly answered by considering what Forsyth feels to be actually available to us. It is not a knowledge of the detailed achievement of God's will in the operation of the world. It is a knowledge that all opposition to the operation of God's will in the world has in fact been met in the Cross. Allowing himself once again a certain freedom with tenses, Forsyth depicts the Cross, like the person, as a point of eternity in time. At this point the whole of reality through time is present and summed up. The force crucifying Christ is not simply the working out of some strands of 1st Judaism, but all the evil of the world, and all the opposition to the will of God. God conquers it in the cross, and therefore we can face it as it actually occurs with confidence that it shall be conquered because it has been conquered.

It is rather as if an individual had been permitted an indubitable vision of his own death-bed scene, in which he was heard to state that his had been a good life, one that he had been glad to lead, and that he died at peace with the world and with God. It seems fair to suggest that

## THE CROSS IN TIME

this knowledge would have a profound effect on the individual, whatever disasters and distresses he suffered on the way to that scene.

It is on a similar kind of level of generality that Forsyth envisages that we are informed about the teleology of the world<sup>1</sup>. We know that God has ensured, by moral means, that the world will one day express His moral nature. As a consequence of the way that God has brought this about, namely the Cross, we have a very broad general outline of the detailed means by which this is happening. Since these detailed means are a working out in time of the eternal fact of the cross, at least we can be sure that they share the nature of the Cross. They will involve, for example, saving judgment, election and sorrow. Beyond this there is only the assurance that God's will shall prevail.

Such is the linkage between the nature of the person as a point of eternity in time, and the nature of the Cross as a point of eternity in time, that we may further gloss the danger of spiritual vagrancy as follows. Because the individual has within his nature the mark and stuff of eternity, were he not able to discern some power working in the world with the certainty that comes from the perspective of eternity, then he could be reasonably sure that there was no such power. In the absence of a belief in such a power, and in the face of the tendency to evil and chaos that there is in the world, few would be able to retain any kind of moral coherence for long. This is because it would be impossible

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1. *The Justification of God* P.78



## THE CROSS IN TIME

under these circumstance to believe that there is any moral end to which one might reasonably work. One would continue to perceive morality as having the aspect of eternity, given its relationship to the conscience, but without any sense of a moral ordering of the world our own puny attempts would seem to fail of that nature.

### 2.6 Setting a Distinctive Agenda

The discussion of Forsyth's metaphysics, and his personalism illustrates, I hope, two points. Firstly it should serve to make clear the scope of Forsyth's theological project. Forsyth cannot be said to have written a systematic Theology, but he is aware of the systematic implications of the ideas that are at the centre of this theological concerns.

Secondly, and leading on from this point, Forsyth is entirely unwilling to abandon the certainty and the perspective of the believing subject in his theological discussion. He does not invite us to accept his metaphysical and personalising moves because they are plausible and satisfactory in themselves. It cannot be emphasised too strongly that the order of Forsyth's argument is : "It appears that I (or we) have been remade, and that this remaking is somehow linked to the Cross. What else must be true, since this is true?"

There are two oddities which may be seen as a consequence of Forsyth's understanding of the relationship between eternity and the personal.

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These are two striking omissions in Forsyth's discussion of the nature of persons, that have clear implications for our understanding of *The Justification of God*. Firstly, there is practically no attempt to discuss directly why it is appropriate for God to allow other persons to behave in an immoral fashion. Secondly, there is very little discussion of why it might be appropriate for God to allow other persons to suffer. In short, we have lost a discussion of human free will, and of God's relationship to the physical world. We must try and understand the implications of this, beginning with the place of certainty.

While there is no discussion of free-will in *The Justification of God*, there is some discussion of freedom. Moral freedom is the fruit of the first creation, and Holy freedom is to be the fruit of the second<sup>1</sup>. God guides history not by overriding it, but by contributing freedom to it<sup>2</sup>. . It is possible that the "Moral Freedom" mentioned here is in fact the same thing as free will, that is, the freedom to do wrong. Forsyth may here be making an oblique reference to some kind of freewill defence to explain the evil nature of the "First creation".

Various things, however point to the fact that free will is not very deeply rooted in his concept of the person. The "Second Creation", for example, is emphasised as a whole new creation. It seems likely that "Holy Freedom", given Forsyth's use of "Holy" in the rest of the book

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.126.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.69.

## THE CROSS IN TIME

means "Freedom from sin", which is a completely different use of the word "Freedom" from that in this phrase "Freedom to Sin". There is, because of his understanding of the relationship of eternity and time, an insistence that God will get his way, and that all things will in the end be redeemed, and are in fact already redeemed. If all the sins and people that have been, and all that ever will be, are present, judged and dealt with before the Cross of Christ, then Forsyth is firmly involved in a particular form of the riddle of the omniscient God and the free agent. Among the options that he does not allow to freedom is the option, ultimately and eternally, to refuse God's election.

I have mentioned above how Forsyth's metaphysics implies a rather insubstantial understanding of suffering. Physical and even mental suffering do not bulk as large, are not as real as sin. Forsyth makes a radical distinction between sin and suffering as challenges for theodicy, insisting that the latter does not really need to be understood by mankind in a theodicy, whereas the former must be<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless there is a marked similarity in his approach to our understanding of it. He appeals once again to the Cross and to eternity. Christ suffered on the cross all that we have ever suffered, concentrated and laid upon him.

*Christ stills all challenge since he made none, but in an utter darkness beyond all our eclipse perfectly glorified the Holy Father. If He, the*

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.139.

## THE CROSS IN TIME

*great one conscience of the world, who had the best right and the most occasion in all the world to complain of God for the World's treatment of him-if he hallowed and glorified God's name with joy instead (Matt xi,25-7; Luke xx iii, 46), there is no moral anomaly that cannot be turned...<sup>1</sup>.*

*In Him the whole creation does but praise.... in advance the God of its salvation...owning that it was worth all it endured to serve with such praise <sup>2</sup>.*

This idea, with the cross acting rather like the death bed scene mentioned in the analogy above, in a sense represents the sum of Forsyth's thought on the place of suffering as a scandal to mankind.

In the course of this discussion of the metaphysical, personal, experiential certainty of the evangelical experience of redemption I have emphasised seven ways in which the development of this idea gives a slant to Forsyth's understanding of the relationship between God and evil.

1) The strong emphasis on the reality of the realm of the moral implies a degree of insubstantiality about physical human suffering.

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.127-8.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.129.

## **THE CROSS IN TIME**

- 2) There is a tendency for the certainty of the evangelical experience of redemption to be emphasised at the expense of human freedom
- 3) The physical world is thought of as the domain of God's will in a way that makes some aspects of the traditional distinction between moral and physical evil difficult to sustain.
- 4) History is thought of as the domain of God's active intervention in a way that makes it difficult to separate God's will from some of the historical processes that lead up to the Great War.
- 5) The paradoxical qualities of Forsyth's understanding of persons in time leads to a search for a certainty in salvation as something already fully accomplished, even though not yet fully in effect.
- 6) The need for a sense of guilt and repentance in the individual's recognition of the evangelical experience of redemption makes it impossible for Forsyth to play down the reality of evil in human nature and history.
- 7) The need for an element of universalism in the understanding of the evangelical experience of redemption makes for a contrasting need to indicate how God's redemption can be seen as a conquering presence throughout history.

## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

### CONTINGENCY, AND THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

How does Farrer's concept of contingency affect the purpose and nature of the argument of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*?

#### 3.1 Stylish, Profound or Systematic

Although Farrer's theological writing is widely admired, it is perhaps more widely admired for its style, than for any other single virtue. Farrer was a man who wrote with great fluency and facility<sup>1</sup>. If one consults him on any subject, one may be sure of entertainment as well as enlightenment. It is possible, however, that the very stylishness of Farrer's writing gets in the way of a serious assessment of its theological virtues, and this is probably most true of that most stylish of books, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*<sup>2</sup>.

At first glance *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* can seem an undemanding book. It is after all a slim paperback, without footnotes or index. The format and manner of discussion seem to imply that all Farrer asks us to bring to the problem of evil, is an open mind, a modicum of

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1. Farrer, A.M. *Reflective Faith*, (London SPCK 1972), p.xi.

2. Richard Harries has some observations on the integral nature of Forsyth's style and thought in his introductory essay to the collection *Divine Action*, Hebblethwaite B. and Henderson E., (Eds). Edinburgh, T.&T. Clark, 1990.

## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

faith and common sense, and a spare afternoon. His language is largely non-technical. He deliberately evades the question of the category of his argument, whether it is philosophical or theological<sup>1</sup>. He jauntily declares that there is nothing new to be said on the subject, and that he can only re-present arguments already ancient<sup>2</sup>.

It may seem churlish to disturb the smooth surface of Farrer's writing, and to suggest that, contrary to appearances, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* represents a powerful synthesis of some of Farrer's more difficult ideas, rather than a mild blend of old arguments and common sense. There is, however, a definite gain to be made from the attempt to see *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* as only deceptively easy. It enables us to avoid the danger of a misreading which Farrer seems almost to invite in the opening paragraphs of the book. It also enables us to bind together apparently disparate elements of his discussion, such as his invocation of the argument from contingency and his doctrine of natures, in a single intellectual structure.

For there is a real danger that Farrer's first paragraph in this book, where he talks about the necessity for the sufferer to regain the power of dispassionate vision, before considering *the place held by evil, ..., in the whole scheme of things*, can set the tone for a reading of the whole work which finds it profoundly unsympathetic, disengaged, and

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.16.

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.16- 17.

## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

glib. It is possible to take Farrer's second paragraph, where he talks of evil as *A thorn in the Christian's side; but in one of his sides only*<sup>1</sup>, as an indication that Farrer is not disposed to take evil seriously, and is willing, in the manner of non-sufferers since the days of Job, to uphold the utility of suffering as a pathway to God.

To show that Farrer's thought is more profound and systematic than might at first appear, is not to suggest that there are two arguments in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, one operating on a common sense level, the other on a more profound level, the former serving to conceal the latter. To allow this would be to imply that there are two different problems of evil. Farrer would not permit the discussion to proceed on the assumption that there was an ordinary "problem of evil" which troubled ordinary believers, and an academic "problem of evil" which troubled academic believers. What I am seeking to demonstrate is that there is one pattern of argument, but that parts of it are abbreviated or simplified in a way that tends to obscure their connection with other areas of Farrer's thought, and to some extent conceal the richness and complexity of Farrer's overall conception.

In fact, Farrer has faith in the faith of ordinary believers, which he regards as not only the raw material of Theology, but, with certain provisos, as a necessary element in the evaluation of theological positions. If a theological proposal is put forward which does not

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.7.



## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

correspond to what Christians recurrently and elementally believe, then, no matter what its virtues, it is fundamentally suspect, so far as Farrer is concerned. This is what he has in mind when he writes *We take it as axiomatic that the straight path of rational Theology must be the prolongation of that basic theism which precedes all philosophising*<sup>1</sup>.

A linchpin of that "basic theism" so far as Farrer is concerned, and to the "prolongation" of it that I discern in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, is the category of contingency. Farrer's concept of contingency is vital to any understanding of the fundamental purpose of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. In this chapter I shall be attempting to expound the significance of contingency in Farrer's thought, in relation to a number of areas. In Farrer's argument contingency is important because it is central to his understanding of the Christian experience of God. It is important because the human experience of evil is primarily an experience of contingency. It is important because it lies at the heart of Farrer's teaching on multiple levels of causation. It is important because it crucially affects the analogical process by which we come to understand other entities as causes. It is important because it composes the fundamental relation between God and the Christian, which is one of growth in Godliness through dependence upon God's first causality. It is important, on another level, because it actually determines why it might be considered reasonable and helpful to write a book like *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* in the first place.

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1. *Faith and Speculation*, p.122.

## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

### 3.2 The Contingency Argument

Ordinary men and women of faith are troubled by the existence of evil in God's creation, and remain faithful partly because of it, and partly in spite of it. The experience of evil brings some to faith, and others to doubt. Farrer seeks to give theological expression to this ordinary fact about faith in the way that he chooses to set up his discussion of God and evil. He does so in terms of the ambiguity of evil in connection with the argument to God from the world on the grounds of contingency, and a specific form of the argument from contingency in the world to the non-contingent God. Farrer argues that it is the mixture of evil and good in the world which sets us thinking about God in the first place <sup>1</sup>. This is an argument with deep roots in the Christian tradition, and one that Farrer holds to be of genuine religious importance.

The contingency argument mirrors the ambiguity of the ordinary experience of ordinary believers, because this argument, at least in Farrer's later version of it, raises questions about the nature of God's purposing in a world that contains evil. We cannot rest content, he maintains, with a version of the contingency argument that is essentially agnostic about the purposes and nature of the being to which the argument points <sup>2</sup>. In Farrer's understanding of the argument, it

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.8.

2. *Faith and Speculation*, p.119f.

## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

raises the question "Why Evil?" quite as insistently as it makes the statement "Lo, God!". With this version of the argument, we cannot avoid raising the kinds of question about the nature of God's work and purposing in the world that are characteristic of discussions of the problem of evil. It would be wrong to treat these two strands in Farrer's thought about contingency separately. They are bound together, and indeed it is the intimate relationship between the Christian experience of God and the Christian experience of evil that makes *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* such an important book.

What is the contingency argument, and how does Farrer believe that this argument from the world to God works? In order to discover the more general argument from contingency, of which Farrer holds the condensed version given in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* to be merely a special form, we shall have to consider his more extended treatments of the subject elsewhere. *Finite and Infinite*, and *Faith and Speculation* are Farrer's two great essays in rational or philosophical Theology. They come almost at the beginning and almost at the end of Farrer's career. They both discuss the contingency argument. During that time his thought about contingency underwent a crucial change.

The contingency of an object (for the purposes of the contingency argument) is that quality or defect in it which drives us to ask "Why is it so?" All attempted explanations of things in the end run back to a brute fact or facts that cannot themselves be explained. That is to say there is something not fully satisfactory, not fully self-explanatory

## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

about objects or facts. This is a difficulty which the atheist embraces as something inevitable and unexplainable. For the theist, however, it is a shortcoming in the natural world that drives us to look beyond it<sup>1</sup>.

What is the nature of that shortcoming? In Finite and Infinite Farrer proposed a formalist version of the contingency argument <sup>2</sup>. That is to say, It is fullness of being that contingent, brute, facts lack. It is this lack of fullness of being that indicates its converse: *an active existence or existent activity which should be full, absolute or entire, having all the "suchness" or modality that is worth having* <sup>3</sup>. In Faith and Speculation, however, Farrer explicitly rejects the formalist understanding of the riddle of contingency, and opts for a voluntarist approach. It is not lack of fullness of being that presses us to the question: *Why is it so?* The sense of an inadequacy in the real world simply does not drive us in the direction of fullness of being. *There seems to be no way of commanding general assent for the formula: "The levels and modalities of all being which is thus or thus are graded by us as measures of Being just being itself"*<sup>4</sup>.

The voluntarist approach to this question finds the contrast to which our awareness of contingency points to be that between conditioned and

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1. *Faith and Speculation*, p.115.

2. *Finite and Infinite*, p.265.

3. *Faith and Speculation*, p.116.

4. *Faith and Speculation*, p.116.

## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

unconditioned will. God alone chooses fully to be as He is. He alone is all he wills to be, and wills to be all he is. This fullness of choice is the quality which brute facts lack, and which, in them, cries out for explanation.

The only part of *Finite and Infinite* that Farrer was moved to recant in *Faith and Speculation* was this "Aristotelian leaven" of formalism over the contingency argument. Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited was published in 1962. It should be clear that at least on the question of the nature of contingency it is likely to be closer to the pattern of thought in Faith and Speculation (Published 1967, but with large parts of it dating from 1964), than to Finite and Infinite (Published 1943)<sup>1</sup>.

These are the words with which Farrer introduces the contingency argument in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*: *If our universe were the safe abode of its own highest glories, if its noblest constituents were secure from the evils which everywhere attack and corrupt them, the world might be God enough to itself; being what it is, it depends on God*

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1. This change in the basis for the argument *A contingentia Mundi* was also pointed out by Charles Conti, in his unpublished Oxford thesis *Descriptive Metaphysics, an examination of Austin Farrer's use of Cosmological inference*. Pgs. 11 & 12. In some ways parallel to the considerations I shall be bringing forward in a later chapter, about the significance of lay Christianity to Farrer (and Forsyth), Conti comments, *I would say...* (that the change from *Finite and Infinite* to *Faith and Speculation*)... *was an attempt to correct the abstract nature of his former use of the cosmological inference, by taking account of the empiricism of the ordinary believer, and the ordinary-language philosopher.*

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above it<sup>1</sup>.

It is easy to misread this passage in two ways. Firstly, one can seek to understand it as a very compressed version of an argument from design: we see things in this world, its *highest glories*, that suggest the hand of an external designer. Secondly, one can see it as a rather unconvincing argument *ad hominem*: "The splendours of this world are so *astonishingly brittle and precarious* <sup>2</sup>, who can bear to believe that they are not defended and sustained by something more eternal and secure!". Unless Farrer is mistaken in invoking contingency in this context, neither of these can be what he is attempting to say.

How are we to interpret Farrer's *line of persuasion*? I have suggested that any version of the contingency argument must operate with a logical tension that is set up between an absolute quality, (e.g. Necessity, or Unconditionedness) and a less than absolute version of that quality, which is instantiated in our experience. We are driven by the attempt to find explanations for things that instantiate these qualities to this lesser extent to a level of brute fact, for which further explanations are sought, and find that they are not forthcoming. We find, if we are not willing to accept the arbitrary existence of such brute fact, that the only satisfactory explanation for the existence of these partial

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1. Farrer describes these words as 'a line of persuasion', and 'a special development of the classic argument from our world to God.' *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.8.

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.8.

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instantiations is the existence of the quality in an absolute form upon which they depend.

*In Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, Farrer writes *God is a simple goodness; the world's good is mixed with many faults and flaws* <sup>1</sup>.

Clearly in this version of the contingency argument, the absolute in question is goodness. We see partial goodness in the world, and find in it something essentially non-self-explanatory about it. When we press the question "why is it so?" we are driven to a conception of the existence of this quality of goodness in absolute form, upon which these partial goodnesses depend.

The banishing of the formalist element in the argument from contingency, which was present in *Finite and Infinite*, changes the whole tenor of Farrer's understanding of the knowledge of God that is derived from contingency. If God is known as unconditioned will, then fairly concrete questions about the nature of that will, and what it is that it wills, can be asked. There is, as he points out himself <sup>2</sup>, no such enquiry that could be attempted in relation to the God of necessary being, of fullness of being.

The unconditioned will which is apparent through the unsatisfyingness of contingency is a will *which makes its own choices and imposes them on*

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.9.

2. *Faith and Speculation*, p.119f.

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others <sup>1</sup>. In this way, the doctrine of contingency (*More fundamental perhaps, than providence*) <sup>2</sup> links up with the problem of evil. The Problem of evil rides hard on the heels of the Contingency argument in this form.

Farrer makes it clear that he is aware of the extent to which his later understanding of the contingency argument raises problems that were not faced by the formalist approach. It is a matter that he discusses at some length in *Faith and Speculation* <sup>3</sup>. I believe that he is making a similar point in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* at the conclusion of his explicit discussion of the contingency argument. It is sometimes quite hard to trace Farrer's own voice and beliefs when he has set up a dialogue within his book between different voices. It seems likely, however, that the "philosophical critic" of page 11 of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is seeking to underline these new difficulties. He is saying in effect "If you attempt to run the contingency argument in this way you will be forced to give an account of God's purposes. Since you cannot, you would be better advised to stick to the variety of argument a *contingentia mundi* which does not present you with this problem."

It is fairly easy to see that a metaphysical conception of God as absolute goodness is likely to give rise to the same, practical, lines

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1. *Faith and Speculation*, p.120.

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.8.

3. *Faith and Speculation*, p.119.



## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

of thought that arose in connection with the understanding of God as unconditioned will. Necessary being can, perhaps, exist in a completely indeterminate causal relationship with finite being. Absolute goodness cannot, if the concept is not to be completely empty of meaning. The problem of evil does, as Farrer's invocation of the philosophical critic suggests, follow very closely upon the heels of the argument a *contingentia mundi* when it takes this form.

Farrer's response is very important for our understanding of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, and the place of the contingency argument.

*Theoretically considered a perception of the world's insufficiency or faultiness justifies the conjecture of an all-sufficient Creator. But in personal fact, we experience imperfection and precariousness in ourselves, not in the objects of our detached contemplation. We turn to God not as an explanatory cause, but as a saving power;... .. men have never, in the mass, felt the Maker in his works, without at the same time finding their wills engaged with the action of a Saviour<sup>1</sup> .<sup>2</sup>*

What this passage makes clear is that Farrer is simply not interested in versions of the contingency argument which operate on the level of theoretical conjecture, those closest to the form of the argument that

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.12.

2. It is very relevant to our more general discussion of Farrer and Forsyth, that we have here an idea, (and even a turn of phrase), that would be quite at home in *The Justification of God*.

## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

Farrer himself used in *Finite and Infinite*. If one is considering a version of the contingency argument in which one may dispassionately accept the proof of the existence of the absolute version of the quality under consideration, and pass on, then it does not seem likely that the mature Farrer would reckon that he is considering a matter of any religious importance. He is interested in contingency at the level of religious engagement, which issues in the contingency argument in its voluntarist form, with the theological and religious difficulties that this form of the argument presents. The voluntarist form of the contingency argument, with both its implications and difficulties, genuinely corresponds with the religion of people who have "in the mass, felt the Maker in his works...".

One central aspect of contingency is the subjection of finite entities to the will of God. It would be absurd to propose that the contingency of real finite entities threw us upon the unconditioned will of God, if the unconditioned will of God were then held to be incapable of any effective action over the contingent world. The contingency of real finite entities would not in any way have been "made good", if we suppose an unconditioned will that could not so act. What is more, an unconditioned will that is incapable of action would be as much a logical monstrosity as the necessary being which Farrer's rethinking of contingency is designed to avoid.

That God does so act is a conclusion that necessarily follows if we give credit to the implications of our experience of voluntarist inadequacy,

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or contingency, in the world. But a will that acts upon finite entities cannot be thought of unless some kind of sense can be given to that action. Some picture of purpose and intention must be possible for the statement "God acts upon finite entities" to have any meaning.

The Christian experience of evil, therefore has an ambiguity for Farrer, no less than Forsyth. It is at once a theophany, because our shortcomings of goodness and will point us firmly towards God, and an impediment to belief. The doctrine of contingency may be more fundamental than that of providence, but the providentialist questions are always in the offing with Farrer's later considerations of the argument from contingency. As we shall see later in this chapter, the argument of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* addresses itself precisely to this ambiguity.

### 3.3 Contingent Knowledge of the Infinite God

By considering Farrer's understanding of Contingency it is possible to determine very precisely the purpose for which *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* was written. In order to demonstrate this, it is necessary to look at some of the epistemological implications of Farrer's doctrine of double causation. In the discussion that follows I shall be attempting to indicate what I take to be the meaning of a fascinating comment on contingency in *Faith and Speculation*. *The very form of "life in God" is voluntary acceptance of a Creative Will which has a scope in principle universal. It is an experiment (if the word can be endured) in drawing*

## CONTINGENCY AND THE THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD

*upon First Causality. ... But what we experimentally realise is a relation having the structure which the contingency argument exploits*<sup>1</sup>.

Discernible divine purposing is a corollary, I have suggested, of the contingency argument in its voluntarist form. It is clear from *Faith and Speculation* that Farrer holds the discernment of this purposing is not to be attempted by discovering points at which the divine will simply takes over from other kinds of causation. At all levels the "paradox of double causation" applies. When God operates in the world he operates through entities that are themselves fully engaged in the actions concerned. The Hand of God is hidden. *Faith and Speculation* seeks to show how this double causation can be understood as operating at all levels of the divine relation with the finite. God's relationship to material entities, to persons, to history are all described in these terms. Even revelation is held to be fully governed by this paradox. It is the transparentness of the relation between the two causes that is distinctive of God's revelatory acts, not something essentially different about their causal foundations.

Double causation is, according to Farrer, paradoxical. A relatively concrete description of the nature of double causality can be found in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. *The way in which natural forces are bent to creative purpose is so subtle, and so perfectly appropriate to the character of those forces themselves, that we cannot see what the*

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1. *Faith and Speculation*, p.130.

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*extra is. The hand of God is perfectly hidden. We can never say what he does to the natural forces, to incline them as he does incline them*<sup>1</sup>.

Paradoxes Farrer suggests, should be palliated. The paradox of double causation, at least as it applies to finite/infinite relations, is palliated, according to Farrer, by two considerations. The first is that our understanding of the causation of God is bound to be systematically inadequate, because it depends upon an analogy between essentially different things, namely finite and infinite causation. Secondly there is the suggestion that we cannot know anything about a causal junction about which we can do nothing. This is an application of Farrer's fundamental empirical principle, that we can know nothing about things about which there is nothing that we can do.

It is the latter of these palliations that is significant for the line of enquiry that I am pursuing. We have discovered that the contingency argument implies that there should be discernible divine purpose in our experience of God. We have discovered that our experience of God's action in the world and on ourselves is governed by the paradox of double causality, and we are reminded by that paradox that we cannot seek to know anything about God, his operation in the world, or in ourselves, about which there is nothing that we can do. What can we do about God? The answer to this question indicates very precisely the nature and purpose of Farrer's discussion of evil and God.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.95.

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What can we do about God? Essentially, for Farrer, we can seek to cooperate with his will. This is the heart of our relationship with God. It is also the heart of Farrer's epistemology of God. Even in contemplation, he argues in *Faith and Speculation*, although there may in some sense be a direct apprehension of the Godhead, it is an apprehension that could have no form unless it were related to the experience of inter-action with the divine that precedes it, in human and individual history<sup>1</sup>.

Because of the paradox of double causality, we cannot trace the finger of God in his individual acts. We can, however, if we are willing to cooperate with the divine will, come to discern God's purpose in a broader context. This is Farrer's view no less in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* than in *Faith and Speculation*. *Looking back over a tract of time, we can see how circumstances have shaped us, even in spite of ourselves, and regret that we have put so many obstacles in the path of a mercy we failed to discern. Yet we probably do ourselves an injustice if we suppose that we could have seen the way plain in front of us. We could only have found it by letting ourselves be led up it. This manner of proceeding is not so mysterious as it sounds. We become sensitive to the leading of God by a faithful attention to common claims, and an obedience to his revealed will*<sup>2</sup>.

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1. *Faith and Speculation*, p.31.

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.171-2.

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The experience of God's saving work, therefore, is one that arises out of a trusting belief that there is such a thing, and a determination to cooperate with it to the extent that one can. Farrer is clear that this experience of God as a person in relation to ourselves is analogous to, but less compelling than, the experience of others as persons in relation to ourselves. Belief in other persons, considered as a proposition, can be given meaning only by drawing some kind of analogy between the other persons and the self. But it is in effect not a propositional belief, but a way of life. Similarly "belief in God" is formed, propositionally, of distant analogies with finite selves. "Life in God", as opposed to propositions about God, escapes the analogical, and operates as a real relationship.

It is perhaps appropriate to repeat here the comment which I have taken as my guiding principle so far in this chapter. *The very form of "life in God" is voluntary acceptance of a Creative Will which has a scope in principle universal. It is an experiment (if the word can be endured) in drawing upon First Causality. ... But what we experimentally realise is a relation having the structure which the contingency argument exploits*<sup>1</sup>.

What Farrer is suggesting is that the God of double causality, who can be known only by cooperation with his will, is also the God of the contingency argument. What we find, in our experience of that

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1. *Faith and Speculation*, p.130.

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cooperation, Farrer implies, is that we are finite in relation to infinite, suffering from a radical personal causal inadequacy to the production of our own effects. The causal inadequacy upon which the contingency argument depends, is to be identified with the paradoxical causal space in which the double causation of divine operation works.

In order to make and maintain the crucial discovery of the possibility of cooperation with the divine will, it is necessary for the individual to be willing to make, and continue to make, the experiment in drawing upon First Causality. If he is thrown into radical doubt about the general structure of divine operation in the world, then he will be less than willing to accept the admittedly idiosyncratic data of his own experimental cooperation. What is necessary for this experiment to continue, so that we can *look back over a tract of time* and discern the mercy of God?

In Faith and Speculation Farrer seeks to clarify the nature of the relation between human beings and God by analogy with human friendship. In Farrer's use, this is not to be understood as a warmly persuasive image designed to make us feel close to God. It is quite simply that this is the closest *analogy* that we have in our experience to that relationship. Given the centrality of the category of analogy to Farrer's understanding of theological method, this makes friendship a very important concept indeed.

*Friends make promises to one another, implicit or explicit, and if they*



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*are honest men, do not break them, except for the sort of reasons which everywhere absolve the fulfilment of undertakings. But outside the field of common reliability, a friend's response is not determinate. We can only know that it will be friendly, and that it will be truly his*<sup>1</sup>.

*The due relation between a man and his Creator establishes a positive rapport between activity on both sides--involving, (ideally speaking) the whole of the man's activity, and such part of the divine as concerns him*<sup>2</sup>.

*There are ways of thinking about the action and will of God, whatever he may be pleased to do, which tend to keep us in friendship with his will*<sup>3</sup>.

It seems reasonable, therefore, to understand *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* as an attempt to find ways of thinking about God that keep us in friendship with his will. It does this, at least in part, by attempting to establish that it is possible to maintain a belief that God is standing by his implicit or explicit promises to us, except where circumstances absolve him of them, and that his non-determinate responses can be understood as friendly. This at least is the implication of the themes of justice, and God's desire to make rational,

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1. *Faith and Speculation*, p.54.

2. *Faith and Speculation*, p.55.

3. *Faith and Speculation*, p.55.

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loving beings for his communion, which I shall highlight in the reconstruction. God's common reliability may be identified with his willingness to allow all entities to exist in accordance with their own natures. The friendliness of his operation may be identified with his undefeatable capacity to bring goods, of a specific kind, out of the evils that occur from the "cross accidents" of his creation.

*In Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, Farrer writes, *Speculative questions deserve speculative answers; and so in this book we have tried to satisfy those whom the riddle of providence and evil intrigues or torments. But the value of speculative answers, however judicious, is limited. They clear the way for an apprehension of truth, which speculation alone is powerless to reach*<sup>1</sup>.

In this connection, we are now in a position to draw together the strands of contingency, double causation, and the "form of 'life in God'", which I am suggesting are essential to any understanding of the nature and purpose of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. Farrer believes that God is discerned in the world and in our lives as infinite in relation to finite. In both cases he is discerned as unconditioned will, compared to causalities that are essentially inadequate to their effects. But in neither case is this a perception that is inevitable, nor in either case is it a perception that is purely formal and contentless. If God is unconditioned will, I may see all that another person

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.187.

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sees, and yet not see God, if I do not look, or if I do not understand correctly. Of unapproachable significance for this discernment is experience of the individual in his voluntary experiment in "drawing on First Causality", cooperating with the will of God.

This "experience in cooperation" is the core of Farrer's understanding of religion, but it is the purpose, rather than the core, of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. Of considerable importance in the decision to trust to this experience is the ability to relate it to some general picture, however external and analogical, of the divine operation of which that individual experience is taken to be a part. Effectively done, it amounts to an invitation to this revelatory cooperation. This latter is the purpose and nature of Farrer's theodicy enterprise.

I believe this point illuminates the relationship between the "theoretical" and the "practical" elements in Farrer's treatment of evil. The need for a clarification of the point can be illustrated by comparing two passages from the opening pages of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*:

*The practical problem is pastoral, medical or psychological and differs from case to case too widely to allow of much useful generalisation. We are concerned with the theoretical problem only*<sup>1</sup>.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.7.

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*Belief in God, we shall maintain, is essentially a practical and a passionate belief....*

*Theoretically considered, a perception of the world's insufficiency or faultiness justifies the conjecture of an all-sufficient Creator. But in personal fact, we experience imperfection and precariousness in ourselves, not in the objects of our detached contemplation<sup>1</sup>.*

I suspect that the contingency argument is important to Farrer not so much as a proof of the existence of God <sup>2</sup>, but as an indication of the form and nature of our knowledge of him. The importance of the problem of evil, I suggest, is that misunderstood evil discourages Christians from making the practical experiments in dependence upon the non-contingency of God which, on Farrer's understanding of contingency, are the source of that knowledge of God.

The following is an extract from the final paragraph of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. I believe that it ties in well with the picture of the nature and purpose of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* that I have been attempting to draw. It seems to challenge, at least in part, the sense that is given in the opening paragraph of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* that for Farrer evil is essentially a theoretical and not a practical problem, to which *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is a purely

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.11-12.

2. *Reflective Faith*, p.200. I take the causal argument to be a close relative of the contingency argument, in Farrer's understanding of them.

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theoretical "solution".

*There are those whom the sight of unassisted misery in other chiefly appals, and leads them to curse or to deny the Author of the Universe. They are seldom those who yield to the natural pressure of sorrowful scenes on a compassionate heart, and give themselves to the work of relief. An overmastering sense of human ills can be taken as the world's invitation to deny her Maker, or it may be taken as God's invitation to succour his world. Which is it to be? Those who take the more practical alternative become more closely and more widely acquainted with misery than the onlookers; but they feel the grain of existence, and the movement of the purposes of God<sup>1</sup>.*

### 3.4 What are Contingent entities like?

So far, in this chapter, I have sought to avoid discussion of the argument of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. I have tried to show how the concepts of contingency, double causality, and *The very form of life in God* provide a context for the understanding of the way in which evil is a problem, as Farrer understands the matter, and the way in which *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* might be considered to be a "solution". I have, in a sense, sought to put a frame round *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* rather than to pay detailed attention to the picture.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.118.

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The basic argument of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* I take to be an unusual elaboration of the freewill defence, and I do not wish to encroach, at this stage, upon the reconstruction of that argument that I shall attempt in a later chapter. It is however an argument that is very dependent upon a specific understanding of what kinds of things (at the most general metaphysical level of thought) there are in the world, and upon their causal relationships with themselves and one another.

*Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is a book about the rights of entities to be themselves, and the wisdom of God in allowing them to be themselves. It operates with a detailed scheme for the understanding of evils that mirrors a complex notion of the hierarchy of natures within a given entity. Farrer's notion of relationship between the natures that may operate within a given entity is, I believe, a close cousin of the doctrine of double causation. They both depend upon the possibility that the full operation of a cause, at a particular level, may leave the outcome of a train of events indeterminate, and subject to choices or determinations made at a higher level. This makes best sense in the light of some philosophical and metaphysical commitments in Farrer's writing that remain constant from the days of *Finite and Infinite* right through to the days of *Faith and Speculation*.

It is to this general metaphysical understanding of reality that I now wish to turn. Here too, we shall find that the concept of contingency, of causal inadequacy, plays a pivotal role. For Farrer, there is in the relationship between Finite and Infinite a layer of causes that are

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inadequate to the production of their effects, cooperating with a Cause who supplies what they lack. In Farrer's more general picture of causes in nature, we shall discover that there are strikingly similar layers of causation within finite entities. First, however, we must look at Farrer's overarching conception of the nature of finite entities, or substances.

The understanding of "the nature (*Physis*) of things" in general in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is recognisably similar to that in the Analysis of Rational Theology in *Finite and Infinite*. Although Farrer does not explicitly invoke this metaphysics in his pursuit of theodicy, it is not hard to show that the work is an exposition in more detail of an understanding of the relations of God and finite substances which is so important to Farrer's thought.

The metaphysical picture of the totality of all that is, with which Farrer, is working may be put thus: There exists, 1) God, infinite, unconditioned and cause of all that is, 2) Finite substances. Finite substances are: i) genuinely coherent, that is they are a real concentration of constituents which individually are sufficiently concrete for appearance, but not sufficiently concrete for existence. ii) internally effective, that is they stand in relationship to themselves as cause. iii) externally effective, that is they stand in relationship to other finite substances as cause.

Finite substances are thus subject to three varieties of causal

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relationship. a) They affect and are affected by other finite substances, so that all things are in a kind of web of causes. b) They are their own internal causes, so that what happens next to a particular finite substance depends on the way the finite substance is at present. Since the way that they are at present is to a significant degree the result of the way that they have been affected by other finite substances in the past and present, and since these other finite substances are the creation of God, a) and b) represent genuine causal relations with God. This makes more sense in the light of, c) They are each individually affected by God in a fashion consistent with a) and b), but essentially mysterious and, at best, only dimly known.

All the entities which Farrer admits have activity at the heart of their nature, although the precise relationship between *esse* and *operari* is not necessarily the same as that understood in *Finite and Infinite*. To be the cause of nothing, is not to be.

It should be clear that the entities discussed in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* are finite substances, as understood in *Finite and Infinite*, whether Farrer is talking about stars, trees or human beings. When Farrer talks about God's respect for their agency and nature, he is talking about internal and external effectiveness <sup>1</sup>. These he calls in *Finite and Infinite* the metaphysical relations of Agency and interior

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.92, for example.



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effect, & operation and external affection <sup>1</sup>. When in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* Farrer talks about God's freedom in the choice of matter as a substrate for natures, he working from his conception of the unconditionedness of God <sup>2</sup>.

There is another element in Farrer's notion of finite substances or entities, as it is found in *Finite and Infinite*, present in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. Again, what appears in the earlier book as a fairly abstract doctrine appears in a more concrete guise. The idea which is present in both is the necessary separation of God's creatures from God himself. To quote from *Finite and Infinite*:

Omnis determinatio est negatio. *In any creature there must be a distinction, evident at least to the divine mind, between that reality by which it represents an aspect of God, and the limitation which makes it other than God. To call this limitation purely negative may not be right, if we consider that there is some positive purpose served by the existence of the creatures in distinctness from God, and that the limitation is a condition of their distinct existence.(...) So that limitation is positive for the fact of the existence of the creatures, but negative for their representation of the divine nature*<sup>3</sup>.

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1. *Finite and Infinite*, pgs 22&23.

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.48.

3. *Finite and Infinite* Pg. 49

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What is presented here as "evident at least to the divine mind" is the subject of the parables by which Farrer attempts to give conceptual form to the positive value of the separation of created beings from God in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. These are expressed in the parable of the garden, and the Rabbinic parable of Noah <sup>1</sup>. For a thing to be a genuine independent creation, it must be separate. God is justified in making the less good, when he has sufficient (possibly and infinitude) of the best.

To say that finite entities of their essence have a genuine coherence, that they are internally and externally effective, that they are affected by God, and that they suffer from and enjoy a necessary separation from God, is to lay down general ground rules for the understanding of the relationship between God and his creation, but such rules would be very general.

The advance from this position, which makes the argument of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* possible, is the development of the notion of levels of causation within finite entities. Within a given entity, Farrer argues, there are levels of causation that have their own coherence, and their own internal and external effectiveness. These

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.65-75. Farrer's final reaction to the two parables is one of disgust, but this is more to do with the absurdity of attempting to understand the nature of God's choosing in choosing physical nature than with the difficulty in finding value in the choice that God has made.

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levels of causation I shall call "constitutions"<sup>1</sup>. A tree has a material constitution, in that its components obey the basic laws of matter, but it has a living constitution as well, in its capacity to flourish, or fail to flourish, as a tree. A cat has three levels of constitution, material, living and animal constitution, and functions on all those levels of causation simultaneously and in concert.

### 3.5 Personal Knowledge and Personal Entities

Where does the category of the personal fit into this? It seems that it does so in a rather ambiguous way. Viewed from one perspective, it is the one thing that we really know about, the interpretative key that we must, perforce, apply in our attempt to understand anything and everything. Looked at from another perspective the personal is merely the highest kind of constitution, directly comparable in its significance with animal and vegetable constitution. It is merely another level of organisation and causation.

This ambiguity arises, of course, from the fact that the personal constitution of human beings can be seen either as the highest expression within a rough continuum of the operation of divine grace in the natural order, or the closest approximation to God's nature.

Theologically a human being is a creation. Epistemologically human

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1. I have preferred "constitution" to "nature". It has fewer historical and philosophical associations, and seems to me to express better the idea of the organisation of parts into a whole that is of a different order of being from those parts.

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beings are the analogy by which we know God, and indeed all things. Because Farrer understands the person as the most complex complex of constitutions, investigating personal constitution is probably the best way to investigate the whole concept of constitutions. Once we have done this, however, it will be necessary to come back to the category of the personal from another direction, and look at its role as the epistemological basis for the whole range of uses of the idea of causation that we have looked at in this chapter.

*Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* concentrates on four kinds of constitution which Farrer would maintain exhaust all that exists in the world<sup>1</sup>. Farrer is concerned to show how the higher constitutions in his range of four are at once genuine irreducible constitutions in their own right, and also fully dependent on the lower constitutions in conjunction with which they form individual entities. My human constitution is genuine and irreducible, but dependent upon, and never contradicting, my constitution as a living animal material body.

As a material body, for example, I am subject to all the same laws as any other material entity. If my body is cut into many parts, then I am cut into many parts, if it is unsupported then I fall and so on through the whole range of possible actions and interactions of material bodies. On the other hand my being alive, although it is dependent upon the maintenance of a certain range of material states of this body, is not

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1. Angels may exist, but Farrer does not bring them inside the range of his theodicy.

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reducible to them. As my material constitution is genuinely internally and externally effective, so is my living constitution.

It seems attractive to suggest that this is best understood in the context of some notion of an indeterminacy of causation<sup>1</sup>. Within a given level of constitution, when all the relevant factors have been described, it can still be that we do not know what is going to happen next. What happens next, indeed, may depend upon a higher level of constitution. The material constitution of my body produces, in a given state of internal and external material relations, a range of possibilities. It lies within the capabilities of my body at this moment, among other possibilities, that I shall either continue to sit here, or that I shall get up and walk away. The machinery, so to speak, is set up to achieve either of these, in a way that it is not for me to fly away, or simply vanish. That I have these possibilities is thus entirely dependent upon my material constitution, and were I nothing more than a material body this is all that there would to be said upon the matter<sup>2</sup>. Possibly the body will get up, or possibly it will not.

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1. William Alston in his essay *How to Think About Divine Action* has some robust criticisms of the tendency for some theologians to regard the causal closedness of reality as proven or axiomatic. (*Divine Action* Pg 51f)

2. Arthur Peacocke in *Zygon* Vol. 26 "God's action in the real world" emphasises what he seeks to be the open quality of physical and biological causes. In particular he argues an anti reductionist line for the relationship between physics and biology, and explicitly extends this up the scale towards the complexity of a human nature. There are a number of similarities between the argument sketched by Peacocke from a scientific point of view in this article, and the arguments of Farrer. In particular he argues that *...the very order and impersonality of the physical cosmos, which makes pain and suffering inevitable for conscious and self conscious creatures, is at the same time the pre-requisite of their exercise of freedom as persons.*(pg. 466).

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Neither is ruled out or entailed by the current state of the internal and external material causation of this body.

But there is something more to be said. The house is on fire. Within the range of possibilities generated by my material constitution, my constitutions as living, animal and human all contribute to the choice that I make. Were I merely an animal facing fire, the laws of physics would determine the material possibilities of escape, and the laws of animal psychology would determine whether I could perceive such a route of escape. That would be all that we could say on the matter. Either the animal will find the escape route, or it will panic and run into the fire. Both possibilities remain open. Both possibilities remain open for me as human as well. The difference is that I can make a choice, at least while reason continues to be available to me. A pebble falls down a hill, where a snail chooses to go down. A cat leaps in panic through the open window, where I deliberately throw myself into the Fireman's trampoline.

It is thus possible to reconstruct from Farrer a relatively subtle account of personhood. Farrer describes four levels of constitution in the world. These constitutions are instantiated by individual entities and in the sense that we are using the word here, a single entity may express one or more constitutions. Each of the individual constitutions in an entity will fulfil the conditions mentioned above of being active, and internally and externally effective as causes. The entity that is composed of more than one constitution must be understood as coherent,

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in the sense which we have drawn from *Finite and Infinite*, and possibly the same is true of each level of constitution in that entity.

This is a cumulative categorisation. That is to say that, in this world at least, an entity having the fourth level of constitution has it in addition to having the other three, and one having the second must be assumed to have the first. In this cumulative classification, the property that distinguishes the first level of constitution from things that have no constitution, that is things that do not exist at all, is energy. The property that distinguishes the second level from this, the material level of constitution, is life. The third level of constitution is distinguished by the property of sentience, and the fourth by the property of speech.

It is within this structure that we must consider Farrer's notion of human nature in its aspect as simply another kind of constitution, differentiated from its lower components by the property of speech. As a physical entity I have energy in action and reaction. As a living entity I am capable of flourishing, or failing to flourish. As an animal I am aware of the world in which I live, and of its potential as bane or blessing for me. In addition to all this I have speech.

From speech comes the ability to talk about the things that there are in the world, and thus the possibility for reason. In talking about the things of the world it becomes possible to see myself as merely another item on a list of such things, which includes my neighbour as another

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thing such as I. It thus becomes possible for me to conceive that we may both be bound by an impartial rule, a notion which is the core of Justice. It becomes possible for me to conceive of him as a person like me, the centre of his reality as I am the centre of mine, and therefore to love him. If human beings are knowing, loving, rational entities, this is the consequence of speech.

Farrer maintains that we believe that loving rational entities can in principle exist on a substrate other than the material living animal that we are. God has none of these as elements of his self, in the sense in which we are using the words here, and the idea of angels is probably not itself logically incoherent. We believe indeed that our own personal constitution will be remade on a more permanent substrate, by the grace of God, even though we have no idea how this might be done.

Having acknowledged this possibility and this hope, however, as well as the fact that our personal constitution, being a constitution, is a genuine cause of itself, conditions itself through time, we must not allow ourselves to deny the implications of being personal beings on a particular substrate. My personality is conditioned by my material constitution, not least in that this ensures that I be only ever in one place at one time. If the wherewithal for salvation should not ever happen to be also in the place where I am, at any stage of my life, then a vital possibility for my person is not made available.

Similarly for the other constituents of myself as an entity. My



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flourishing or failing to flourish, the time and nature of my birth and death, my sufferings and pleasures, the physical existence of my brain all play their part in my life as person. It would be idle to suggest that my personality had more than limited ability to change the way all these things affect it.

So far I have looked at Farrer's notion of personal constitution as simply another level of causation in the created realm. It is important to remember that Farrer also reckons our human nature as not "just another constitution", but as the basis for our knowledge of and thought about all other kinds of things. In order to make sense of this it is necessary, as I have suggested above, to understand that Farrer holds to some kind of doctrine of the inadequacy of material causes. This emerges most clearly in the essay Causes in *Reflective Faith*, which is dated soon after *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. He accepts that the notion of the inadequacy of material causes in the past has in many ways traded on the feeling that causes should be assimilated in their completeness and security to logical implication. This view of the matter has been sufficiently disposed of by the empirical movement. Nevertheless theologians feel in their bones that there is an inadequacy in material causes, that they are insufficient to attain their effects on their own, and that therefore they do not in themselves amount to fully adequate explanations.

Farrer proposes that our understanding of material causes should be

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regarded as a *privileged graded model* drawn from *our own* experiences as causers and objects of causation. A graded model is a model neither simply used as a shorthand for referring to a pattern (as when the growth of a historical movement is compared to the growth of a tree) nor simply a typical and illuminating example of a kind (as in the use of the Oedipus myth in psychoanalysis). A graded model is something of the same kind as the thing to be clarified by the use of the model, but on a different plane. The examples Farrer uses are the understanding of human nature by analogy with animal instinct, and the understanding of animal consciousness by analogy with human consciousness. The latter may be thought of as a privileged graded model, since there is one term of which we have special, immediate, privileged understanding, that is, human consciousness. All our other understandings of causes arise from this particular privileged understanding of cause, with suitable discounts or premiums.

Farrer suggests that it is because material causes lack so much that is essential to our understanding of ourselves as causers that, for better or worse, theologians find it necessary to talk of their inadequacy as causes. This inadequacy is supplied by the notion of God as First Cause, although Farrer is explicitly clear that the project of tracing the finger of God in material causation is doomed to failure. It is in the context of this supplying of the inadequacy of material causation that much of the space for the operation of God's voluntary and providential choice is to be understood.

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Human experience of causation is thus regarded as normative simply because there is none other available to us. Unless we are to settle into the Humean denial of real causation, or the defunct doctrines of high Aristotelism, we have no choice in the matter. With care, by abstraction, we must seek to understand from what we know of ourselves as causes, what causes are at other levels.

God is understood as cause by a similar analogy. The kind of abstraction from ourselves as causes that is done differs, but the principle is the same. I experience God as cause in some over-arching sense of living in and cooperating with a willed structure. It is a will like mine, yet not like mine, causing as I cause, yet not as I cause, that is the experiential foundation of belief. What does one abstract from one's experience of oneself as cause in attempting to understand this higher cause with which one seeks and sense alignment? In the first instance, all kind of physical, bodily, and animal constraint, at least such as might be imposed by any other agent. As Will God can effect, animate, but he is not bound to the particular set of operations that confine our ability to act directly to our own bodies. Secondly all failure of loving rationality. We can conceive as capable of infinite improvement the love and rationality that we experience in ourselves.

It is worth noting the close analogical relationship between the paradox of double causality in the relation between finite and infinite nature, on the one hand, and the causal relationship between different levels of finite constitution on the other. The constituent elements of a tree are

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fully causally involved in its growth, but they are also affected by another level of causality altogether, that of the tree itself. One would look in vain to discern where the material level of causation ends and the vegetable begins. This is not to say that the "tree element" in the causal structure that means that a certain collocation of matter produces leaves in the spring is to be identified with the "divine element". The point is more correctly, that the cooperative over-ruling that Farrer holds to be characteristic of the divine relationship with his creation, is also, on his understanding, characteristic of the operation of higher levels of constitution with their constituent parts. When Farrer is talking about divine causation he is talking about something mysterious, but not in any way tenuous<sup>1</sup>.

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1. I am aware that the link I am drawing between the causal links between the different levels of creation, and the causal link between Finite and Infinite nature is bound to be controversial. Exponents of Farrer, such as Brian Hebblethwaite (*Theology* Vol 73 Pgs 541-551) are inclined to down play the contriving, interventionist quality of Austin Farrer's understanding of divine causation. There is nothing in the entire controversy between Hebblethwaite and Wiles in *Theology* Vols. 84 & 85 to suggest that they would be willing to contemplate such a "strong" reconstruction of Farrer's thought in this area. Indeed, Hebblethwaite specifically rejects the parallel I am indicating. *Farrer is not arguing that causal indeterminism is the specific locus of divine action.* (*Religious Studies* Vol. 14, 1978) I am somewhat comforted therefore to find a passage in Rahner's writings, referred to by Owen Thomas, (*Divine Action*, Pg 43), which seems, independently, to make a link that parallels the one I am suggesting Farrer made. Rahner writes, *Yet ultimately it is not really the most important thing about a miracle and its acceptance, whether the natural scientist can or cannot positively show in the case of a particular miracle a law of nature has been suspended, or at least what is meant by such a law here, or whether he simply leaves the matter as something he cannot explain and the regards this inexplicability as something merely temporary from his methodological standpoint as such. For, in the first place, one need not necessarily speak of a suspension of the laws of nature and yet may accept the miracle, viz. if one presupposes (what is self-evident) that every determined level and order of being is, from the very start open towards a higher level and order and can be incorporated into it, without its own laws thereby having to be suspended. The laws of two dimensional space are valid also in three dimensional space, even though they are given quite a different*

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For Farrer, the personal constitution that we share with God is causing, acting, loving rationality. Yet it is possible for God and me to have different responsibilities to the same third party. Faced with a starving beggar, it is my duty to relieve his distress. My loving rationality calls me to it, and my causing nature makes it, sometimes, possible. It is presumably also God's duty, and he has responsibilities no less to the physical distress of the beggar than I do. Indeed Farrer probably wishes to say that when I relieve the distress of the beggar I am not merely doing something in accordance with God's will, something of which He would approve. I am being God's way of caring for the beggar. That is how God acts to relieve suffering.

But if I will not care for that sufferer, or do not know of his suffering, then he will go uncared for. It is not God's responsibility to step in and do that caring when I do not do it, or do not know that

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...Continued...

*meaning there. It is true that biology, for instance, is a sphere or a higher order in which there are phenomena which do not exist in physics and chemistry, without it following from this that the laws of inorganic matter must necessarily be suspended in biology. Similarly, the world in its material context must be conceived as open from the outset to the reality of the Spirit and of faith seen as the total act of the innermost core of the spiritual person, and must be conceived as open to the reality of God. Hence the higher dimensions of the whole of reality come to appear in the lower dimensions of this reality by transforming them, but in such a way that the lower dimensions are preserved at the same time as the meaning and nature of the higher reality becomes visible with them. (Rahner, K. *Theological Investigations* 5 (Baltimore, Helicon Press 1969)Pg 467f)(my underlining). It is not clear whether, in this passage Rahner is construing miracles as caused by Faith or caused by God, but it is clear that he is drawing a strong analogy between the openness of lower orders of being to higher levels of order and being, and the total openness of the world to God.*

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it is to be done. In a sense one could say that the whole problem of evil stands between the concept of human personality and that of divine personality. If there were no evil then one would assume that the responsibilities were the same. The more evil become apparent the more we need to understand those responsibilities as different.

Partly the difference is a matter of having direct control of a material constitution, which allows us to make alterations in the material states of things that are in accordance with their nature. To generate out of nothing a meal for a starving beggar might be to abuse the whole material fabric of the universe in a way that cooking a meal for him would not.

This however leaves us with an awkwardness in our understanding of our physical constitutions. When we are attempting to form or clarify our conception of God we do so Farrer suggests, by purging from our own experiences of ourselves as cause, all constraints that are purely human. Being uniquely located in space and time, being embodied, would be one of those constraints. But we seem to be implying here that God might reasonably be thought of as frustrated in his desire to exercise his rational benevolence by the lack of a body. Our dependence upon the analogy with our own causal selves seems to be leading us into paradox.

The moral of this would seem to be that we cannot sustain an understanding of God as personal solely on the basis of his causal relations with his creation. These are too different from our causal

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relations with other entities for our belief in his personalness to survive the translation.

This is, perhaps, a roundabout way of saying that the argument from design will not bring us to a conception of a God who is personal to the extent that he shares a moral universe with us. In a sense this is of a piece with the point I was making in the first half of this chapter.

*Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is not to be thought of as a special appendix to the argument from design. It is designed to help us construe a relationship.

### 3.6 Another Distinctive Agenda

Farrer comes to the problem of evil, therefore, with two central concepts, each of which is really the converse of the other, the concept of contingency and the concept of independent constitutions. The concept of contingency defines the way in which evil is a problem to believers, and the way in which it is not. Together with the concept of independent constitutions, it defines the way in which God may be understood as operating in the world, and the ways in which God may not. Our experience of ourselves as cause and will provides what I take to be Farrer's minimum requirement of an understanding of God's operation, that of an active, contriving will, choosing among the unfolding possibilities of this world.

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#### *The Justification of God, and Forsyth's Doctrine of the Eternal Causal Efficacy of the Cross.*

#### 4.1 The Three Fundamentals

*The Justification of God* is not an orderly book in the way, for example, that *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* can be thought of as a fugue, where a melodic line is reiterated in a way that contributes to a satisfying and complex harmony. Forsyth can be compared to some of the music of Elgar, never lost, somehow always on the verge of a melody, constantly picking up and reworking earlier fragments, until they become completely familiar and full of associations.

What I am attempting in this reconstruction is, therefore in some ways an idealisation of Forsyth's argument. I am attempting to draw out the basic pattern of Forsyth's thought about God and evil, which underlies his particular comments on philosophical theodicy, pessimistic monism, the importance of Theology, the failure of international authority, the nature of divine election, pantheism, chalcedonian anglicanism, group personality, the hegelian understanding of history, evolution, and all the other subjects he attends to in *The Justification of God*.



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It is possible, without too much artificiality, to sum up the underlying argument of *The Justification of God* in three sentences. 1) All the evil and failure of the world was present, and finally dealt with, at Calvary. 2) The way the world goes can only be understood in the light of God's way with the world, as revealed in the Cross. 3) Attempts to understand the way the world goes which do not centre on God's moral and redemptive nature are doomed to futility and contradiction. Each of these sentences requires considerable exposition, and in expanding them we can discern the most characteristic elements of Forsyth's thought about God and evil. In this chapter, therefore, I shall use the sentences as the structure for my presentation of the argument of *The Justification of God*. In order to help make sense of these three fundamental elements in Forsyth's argument, however, I shall first put forward a kind of graphic presentation of what I take to be the pattern of thought that underpins them, and of the place theological reflection may, in consequence, appropriately play in the Christian life.

### 4.2 Reality Seen Two Ways

It may help us to understand the fundamental structure of Forsyth's thought about God and evil, if we try to hold in mind two contrasting pictures of reality, which Forsyth would maintain are simply reality seen from the perspective of eternity and from the perspective of time.

The first picture is eternal. It centres on the Cross. It is an essentially static picture. All the human beings that have ever existed

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are present, with all the evil and good that they have ever done. Christ is on the Cross. His presence on the Cross is at once the judgment of God upon evil, and the salvation of all that has been evil. The evil is fully shown forth, and fully dealt with. It is dealt with, not in any nominal or transactional way. There is no element of legal fiction, of God looking upon the sinner, and ascribing to him the righteousness he finds in Christ. It is dealt with in a practical way. By the power of the Cross, the evil that human beings have become is undone, and they are recreated.

There are three elements in this picture that I particularly want to stress. The first is its eternal-yet-historical nature. Forsyth is not attempting to replace the historical crucifixion with some cosmic event. He is not, for that matter, thinking of those physically present at the historical crucifixion as in some sense representative of all humanity. He is saying that this event was an intersection of eternity and time, a point at which something eternally true became historically manifest, and at which an historical reality became an eternal achievement.

The second is the universality of the picture. When Forsyth indicates that all persons are present at the Cross, he is unwilling to exclude anybody from that congregation. It is essential to his pattern of argument that none should be excluded, and we shall see when we look at the historical correlate of this static picture, that he is willing to

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extend history into future and unknown states of reality <sup>1</sup>, rather than exclude those who, in this life, have not come to any sense of their presence before the Cross.

The third is the robustness of the notion of the "righteousness of God", the "right-wising" of God, with which Forsyth is working. We have seen above that under a moral metaphysic, a moral change in the individual is as significant a change as can take place. In this picture, God makes us acceptable to himself by changing us, and he changes us by exerting a very particular moral pressure, or energy on us, which flows from the Cross <sup>2</sup>. The eternal aspect, the universality and the notion of righteousness in this vision are probably incompatible with the possibility that any individual will, ultimately, be able to reject the new relationship with God into which he is brought by the Cross.

The second is a more familiar moving picture. If the Cross is the intersection of eternity and time, what Forsyth describes as "eternity in a point" the same is true of each individual person <sup>3</sup>. It is on the individual person that the second picture is centred. We have an individual person, clearly living in ordinary, directional, time bound reality. Within the limits of his understanding he can survey any period of history, and seek to understand the processes that underlie what

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.166.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.131.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.46, 168.

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happens. It is clearly impossible for him to come to a fully secure induction from his experience and study of such periods in time, to an eternally secure reality underlying them. This individual perceives the struggle between Good and Evil, the incoherence of his own moral nature, at once made for responsibility, and steeped in unrighteousness. He cannot form any notion of the way the yearning for completeness and righteousness might be answered in the world by a reality working to this end <sup>1</sup>.

Into this picture now comes the evangelical experience of the redemption of the conscience. Effectively, the evangelical experience links the two pictures, and enables the latter to be interpreted in the light of the former. The evangelical experience, properly understood, is the revelation to the individual person of his own presence before the Cross. It is the God-given discovery of the completed reality of an individual's salvation. It leads directly to an understanding of the salvation of all people as a reality already completed *in petto*, a reality seeking expression in history <sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> We turn back to the thread of history, upon one part of which the individual stands, and other parts of which he can survey. The individual no longer needs to attempt an induction of the direction of history. The key, the *telos* has already been given. In the end, all human beings will be made right with God, their will perfectly blended

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.41.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.43-4.

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with His will. Because of the picture of an eternally achieved fact one is seeking to see how something that has already been accomplished is being effective in the world.

It might seem that simply to have grasped the goal, the *telos*, does not take us very far forward in the understanding of history. This is to underestimate the implications of the link between the two pictures. If they are indeed different pictures of one and the same reality, then it follows that what is happening in the "eternal" picture, tragedy, redemption, sorrow, saving judgment, is what is also happening in the "historical" picture. The force and method that governed and overcame evil in the former, is the force and method that overcomes evil in the latter <sup>1</sup>.

Not all people, at any one point in history, are being brought into that conscious relationship with the Cross that binds these two pictures together. Those to whom this reality is being made present, at any given time, are the elect of their generation, and the full tale of God's way with the historical world is made up of election through the evangelical experience of redemption, sorrow, and saving judgment, in a world essentially tragic <sup>2</sup>. Because the pictures are reflections of each other, however, we may be sure that within history, albeit *supra mundane* history, all people will be brought to that saved relationship in which

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.53.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.163, 166, 176f.

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they still  
and in the "eternal" picture.

The eternal-yet-historical nature of the first picture, its universality, and its robust conception of the "right-wising" of God are all reproduced in the second picture. The historical picture is the eternal, unpeeled, so to speak, or stretched out. In order to maintain the universality of the second picture, it is necessary to speculate on indeterminate future states, and this Forsyth is not frightened to do <sup>1</sup>. The active "right-wising" of God is identified with the good deeds, and the holiness, of God's elect in history, and particularly some historical strands of Christianity.

Although the pictures, as I have drawn them, have concentrated on individual persons, and their eternal and historical relationship to the cross, there is another important element in the second picture, that of group personality. Group personalities, such as nations, are not personal in the full sense, and therefore do not have a full part in the eternal picture. Although a people or a culture can be, or fail to be, acting in accordance with the will of God, it cannot, as such, be saved. Such things are, however, sufficiently personal to fall under judgment. They can fall under the condemnation of the Cross, even if they do not come within the scope of its salvation. This element of group

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.157, 162.

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personality is vital to Forsyth's understanding of the War <sup>1</sup>.

Most clearly of all, however, presenting Forsyth's thought in terms of these two pictures should help us to understand the place of certainty in his thought. His rejection of patterns of thought that work on induction, his insistence that faith is characterised by certainty, can seem Quixotic. It is perhaps less so when it is understood in terms of an eternal event that contains, in detail, the already accomplished conquest of time by eternity.

Of course, the precise relationship between eternity and time in these two pictures is bound to remain difficult to understand, and many questions remain. Two of those questions deserve consideration at this point. Firstly, what are the implications of the relationship between eternity and time, for Forsyth's thinking about freewill? Secondly, how does Forsyth believe that this pattern of thought answers the moral and intellectual demands that I suggested, at the end of the last chapter on Forsyth, were fundamental to his thought? If Forsyth's understanding of freewill may be reckoned one of the least attractive aspect of his thought, then we might perhaps consider these questions as relating, respectively, to the price and the reward of Forsyth's essay in certainty.

We should notice how these two pictures of reality relate to Forsyth's

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.46-8, 103-4.

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fundamental understanding of personal nature as eternity in a point, as I described them in the previous chapter. Only persons could stand at once in these two pictures, and only if they are understood in this particular way.

We can see also Forsyth's willingness to abandon anything but a shadow of a free will defence in his thought about God and evil. The relationship between eternity and time is bound to remain a riddle, but it is not a riddle that leaves room for the ultimate rejection of God by any individual. There is a price to be paid for certainty.

Forsyth writes of the new and more satisfactory historical understanding of humanity that came with the decline of the Hegelian synthesis, *He (sc. a person) is not simply a crossing point nor a point of fusion; he contributes. He gives as truly as he receives, and if he does not give he ceases to receive. He brings to the ideas round him something more than they supply. There is a miraculous something in him which is not in them as cause. He is himself directive*<sup>1</sup>.

It is clear that, at least in connection with culture, Forsyth is determined to assert the freedom and dignity of the individual. To think of the individual as primarily the creation of his age is to get the matter the wrong way round.

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.48.



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But if the individual is fundamentally creative, so is Christ. *The new and final Humanity lies in the Act of its holy Redeemer;.....That act is an absolutely new beginning of the race, a second creation.....The new creation must of course arise out of the first, for, though it is an absolute Act, it does not take effect in an absolute way. But it is a more grave matter to regenerate the first creation than it was to organise chaos into the first. The opposition of chaos, void and formless, was passive, but the opposition of the creature is active. It is a family quarrel, and they are the worst. It is not matter against force but will against will. It has behind it all the power of the freedom which makes the first creation chiefly what it is*<sup>1</sup>.

These two themes of the freedom of the individual and the creativity of Christ may be tied together in a third passage *The final key of the first creation is the second; and the first was done with the second in view. If moral freedom is the crown of the first creation, spiritual, holy freedom is the crown of moral; and it is the gift in the second creation. The first creation was the prophecy of the second*<sup>2</sup>.

How do moral freedom, the *Miraculous something* in man, and Spiritual freedom tie in with *The great and final assurance that God will save, must save, has saved His own holy purpose, gospel and glory* <sup>3</sup>? What are

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.65-66.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.126.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.127.

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we to make of *We believe because He makes us believe-with a moral compulsion, and invasion and capture of us* <sup>1?2</sup>

It is not clear that this is a question to which Forsyth has a definite answer. It is one that arises precisely in the attempt to render his writing systematic. He presents a picture of the final state, (A Whole of Wholes), of the current state (Rebellious freedom) and of the operative entelechy (The cross working through election to redemption), but he does not draw out the full pattern of implications.

Some observations are however relevant. Forsyth maintains, as we have seen, that in the end all are elect to salvation. Similarly, for all his awareness of the importance of culture for the faith of individuals, his sense that an anthropocentric period will produce egoistical people, for example, there is no sense that the human will, even in a defective culture, is ultimately and metaphysically defective. It is structured free, and *ipso facto* responsible, dimly aware of its responsibility, and hence of its relation to God<sup>3</sup>.

It is clear that moral freedom includes the capacity for the rejection of the evangelical experience. If this were not so then it would be absurd to write about it at such length. In the first chapter of *The*

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.44.

2. For the word 'compulsion' cf *The Justification of God*, p 158. "If we saw all His scheme our faith would be compelled, and not free".

3. *The Justification of God*, p.13.

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*Principle of Authority* Forsyth is quite eloquent about the range of uncertainties about the experience that might lead to its rejection. But it is not a rejection that can in the end be permanent, because it is not a rejection that is fully compatible with the soul becoming what it really is<sup>1</sup>.

This point can perhaps best be understood by registering that freedom of the human soul is not just freedom (to do one thing rather than another), but moral freedom (to do good rather than evil, or evil rather than good). That is to say that we are given precisely enough freedom to make us moral entities, just as much as is necessary to make our choice of good and evil and our final acceptance of God's election genuinely ours. In order to make that choice a real choice it is necessary that we have an awareness of good and evil, at least at some level. Freedom without this awareness would not be moral freedom, but something else. This deep underlying awareness of good and evil, which Forsyth speaks of in connection with our sense of responsibility, and which is so characteristic of our conscience, amounts, in the end, to an affinity with God that renders our final acceptance of his election an eternal certainty. As the moral realities become more apparent through the aeons of creation <sup>2</sup>, so the nature of the choice becomes more inevitable.

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1. *The Principle of Authority* , p.17. This at least seems to be the implication of the strong opening, and indeed of the whole theme of authority.

2. This is how I read the difficult passage in *The Justification of God*, Page 166.

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The deepest thesis of *The Justification of God* is that God has this power to heal and include rather than overbear and destroy each of us, and all that stands in the way of his holiness <sup>1</sup>. It seems to me that this is a thesis which can only stand with a relatively limited doctrine of freedom, tempered by something like the affinity I have suggested above.

It may be worth asking if Forsyth is a determinist. In one sense we are already eternally assured of the end, and this is a sense that would be very congenial to a determinist. In another sense we are free to do as we will with those particular parts of the means that are at our disposal. The awareness of the eternally assured end is something that arises from the evangelical experience which, we are suggesting, the individual is free to reject, but it seems reasonable to assume that it is an awareness that only comes with the acceptance of that experience<sup>2</sup>.

Again the only way to make sense of these different emphases seems to be to conceive a limited freedom. On acceptance of the evangelical experience the conscience becomes aware of its eternal nature. Seen from the perspective of eternity we are each freely choosing one or another, more or less direct, routes to the final acceptance of the evangelical experience. (Seeing from the perspective of eternity is not of course simply a matter of seeing over a very long period of time. It is seeing

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.65.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.53. To believe in a teleology you must be in possession of the telos.

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also in accordance with the true nature of the soul and of the forces operating upon, something only possible with the acceptance of the experience of salvation).

We are working with an understanding of reality that presents it as having at once an eternal and a temporal aspect. Persons, by their very nature inhabit both aspects of reality. Election, and the evangelical experience of redemption bind together these two aspects, making the achieved fact of salvation real in history, and bringing the individual historical person before the bar of the eternal cross<sup>1</sup>. Where do theodicy and Theology stand in this?

It is helpful to try to understand Forsyth's commitment to Theology in terms of the two pictures of reality I outlined above. I suggested that the link between the two pictures was election, and the evangelical experience of redemption (which are probably the same thing). Election, sorrow and saving judgment are present in eternal form at the Cross, and active in historical form in the world as we experience it. The effectiveness of this link, however, depends to a large extent on Theology. The recurrent theme of *The Justification of God* however, is that the Church, which is created and sustained by election and the experience of redemption, can misuse or trivialise its heritage<sup>2</sup>. It needs good Theology to fully to express, fully to make effective, its

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.80.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.15.

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election and experience of redemption<sup>1</sup>.

Theology may be thought of as serving two fundamental purposes. It raises the individual and the Church above the questions raised by the personal experience of salvation, to the an awareness of salvation as a universal matter<sup>2</sup>. It drives the individual and the Church to a deep interrogation of its understanding of God and the world<sup>3</sup>. In fact Theology addresses the requirements for the transition from "I am certain" to "It is certain" that I discussed in the previous chapter. It guides the evangelical experience beyond the personal and subjective, by leading it towards its universal implications, and towards its origin in the greater subjectivity of the divine nature.

Let us assume that the "eternal" and the "historical" pictures with which I began this chapter represent, in schematic form, what Forsyth would take to be "a Theology". Let us imagine that we have before us a person of reasonable intelligence, but no theological sophistication, who has had an experience of the salvation of God, and is aware, fundamentally of three things: 1) His own previous unrighteousness. 2) His current status as redeemed. 3) Some link between the change from (1) to (2) and the Cross. This is a person in the "I am certain" stage of faith, as Forsyth conceives it. What role does Theology have to play in

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.128, 95-96.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.2.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.125.

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the "It is certain" that is connected with the universalisation of the experience, and what role does it have to play in the "It is certain" that is connected with the tracing of that experience back to its source?

Firstly, Theodicy, Theology and the universalisation of the evangelical experience. Forsyth writes *Any salvation of us must be a salvation of all that God's holiness covers and claims, i.e. of the whole universe. I am saved only in a world salvation*<sup>1</sup>. And in: *The Justification of God: We believe in a great destiny for the world because we have faith in its redemption which rests on the experience of our own, but is no mere expansion of it* <sup>2</sup>.

The question we are addressing is of course: what in that belief is "no mere expansion" of the experience mentioned in the last, and what are the grounds of that extra. The answer, at its most general, is that, whereas the assurance of personal redemption is personal and pre-theological, a matter, as we have seen above, upon which the individual speaks with unique authority, the assurance of universal redemption is theological. *...the only teleology of the world which is as sure as sorrow, death, the soul, or its God... is theological religion*<sup>3</sup>.

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1. *The Principle of Authority*, p.30.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.51.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.51.

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The personal experience is of central significance to the theological reflection. *To believe in a teleology we must be in possession of the telos*<sup>1</sup>. But *the telos cannot be reached by an induction from small areas of the past, far less from our individual experience (of history)*<sup>2</sup>. It is only because of the fact of individual salvation that we know what to look for in the process of the world that leads to universal salvation.

It is fairly clear that the more traditional understand<sup>ing</sup> of theodicy, (human discourse justifying the ways of God to Man), has some place in the universalisation of the implications of the evangelical experience, despite Forsyth's rejection of philosophical theodicy. There is manifestly a tension between the evangelical experience, if it is drawn to universal implications, and the experience of the world as a place in which the conquest of sin is neither complete, nor obviously tending to completion.

Forsyth's Theology, which I have attempted to encapsulate in the notion of two pictures of reality, meets this demand for theodicy in two ways. It offers a vision of a conquest of evil and sin that is already in principle complete, and it offers a key to understanding history as the domain of God's will. In effect it tries to show, albeit in an unusual way, what ordinary theodicies try to show; that the experience of evil is compatible with a belief in the ultimate goodness and power of God.

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.53.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.205.



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It indicates how we can know that the phenomena that trouble us when we try to understand the world in terms of the evangelical experience have in fact already been dealt with, and how we can roughly trace God's way of dealing with them, in history.

We should note that in this facet of Forsyth's discussion, evil plays the same role that it plays in most theodicy discussions. It is a problem for belief. As I suggested above, evil is an obstacle in the way of the move from "An experience of redemption has made me certain" to "Redemption is a certain fact in this World". Even here, however, where Forsyth is at his closest to addressing the demands of rational theodicy, he does not let go of the perspective of the believing subject. It is the implications of the certainty inherent in the faith arising from the evangelical experience that drives Forsyth, for instance, into his speculation about future realms of experience. This speculation cannot be understood as a response to a need to show God as just, to a skeptical and dispassionate world.

Secondly, Theology, and the route to the fundamentals of faith: We are trying to find out the significance of Theology, and specifically of Forsyth's Theology of the relationship between time and eternity, for a believer who has grasped the raw evangelical experience of redemption. I have talked above about the difficulty of combining this emphasis upon the experience of the believing subject with a defence against the charge of arbitrary subjectivity. I suggested that within Forsyth's pattern of thought the only thing surer than personal subjectivity was

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the greater subjectivity of God. The only thing more sure than knowing, is knowing that you are known<sup>1</sup>. How does the theological scheme encapsulated in these two pictures enable the individual believer to move from the subjectivity of his own knowledge of salvation, to the greater subjectivity of knowing that he is known?

The answer probably lies in the sense that the "eternal" picture represents the whole of reality, whereas our experience of history is inevitably limited to a small part. If we are in fact present before the Cross, and securely redeemed, then our life in faith is a matter of finding and following a path already known to God. The picture of the Cross is a picture of judgment, and judgment implies knowledge. At that eternal point in time, the Cross, we see how God sees us, and we see that he knows us as we truly are. We know ourselves, receive ourselves, by knowing that we are known, fully and securely judged.

For this security, however, the natural fallenness of human nature is as essential as the awareness of redemption. It is precisely because we know that we could not of ourselves achieve the judged and redeemed state, that we can be sure that it is not an illusion. This is not like traditional theodicy. The experience of a divided and evil world operates in a very different way in this move from the move from "An experience of redemption has made me certain" to "It is certain this redemption is of God". In this element of Forsyth's Theology, the very

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.77.

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incomprehensibility of some aspects of the "temporal" picture is a reassurance as to the reality of the "eternal" picture.

What I have said so far, in the previous chapter, and in this, relates mostly to the implications of the supra historical belief in the eternal co-presence of all history before the Cross. It would be fair to think of it as an exposition of the first sentence in which I attempted to sum up Forsyth's argument. *All the evil and failure of the world was present, and finally dealt with, at Calvary.*

### 4.3 Understanding the World in the Light of the Cross

To leave the matter here would be to lose track of one of the most distinctive aspects of Forsyth's *Lectures for War-Time on a Christian Theodicy*. Forsyth is not writing a supra-historical work. He is writing for war-time, and trying to make sense, in a very historical way, of the experience of his time and his culture. This particular disaster is happening in this particular way, because of the particular relationship between this Culture and God.

Forsyth believes that his Theology, which I have attempted to characterise in terms of the intersection, at the Cross and in the person, of eternity and time, provides his contemporaries with the interpretative key to the War. He believes that the way the world goes can only be understood in the light of God's way with the world, as revealed in the Cross. It would be possible for this to be left in a

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state of considerable abstraction, where the emphasis in the "intersection of eternity and time" lay more on a supra-historical assurance of the final completedness of things, than on any kind of scheme of interpretation. Forsyth does not permit himself such bland reassurances. On the contrary, he is quite outspoken in his concrete interpretation of God's place in the outbreak of the War.

Forsyth proposes the discernibility in the world of an inexorable atonement. It is an atonement that is known fundamentally in the individual, but once that knowledge of atonement has come to the individual, it becomes perceptible, even painfully apparent, in the whole of creation. Individual election is the key to our understanding of history. Nevertheless it is an interpretative key that applies only imperfectly to God's relationship with the group personalities of nations and peoples. In order to make proper sense of this, we need to discuss the relationship between Forsyth's understanding of God's way with the individual, and his understanding of God's way with the corporate entities that are necessarily a major part of any understanding of history.

Forsyth's notion of corporate entities is a strong one. It is complicated somewhat further in Forsyth by his desire to apply his most fundamental metaphysical category, personality, at least to a limited extent, to the group. For at least some purposes the concept of group personality is something more than a convenient abstraction or expository device.

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In his chapter The Problems: Revelation and Teleology for instance, Forsyth speaks of the initiating capacity of the group in history in a way that he acknowledges to be very close to the kind of account that he gave of the individual. I quote this passage because it seems to me to represent very well an ambiguity in Forsyth in connection with the concept of group personality. On the one hand it seems to take the concepts of divine operation (redemption, election, guilt, etc.) that he associates particularly with the individual into a wider sphere; on the other hand it seems to threaten the central importance of the classic soul and the evangelical experience. Just at the point where Forsyth seems to be about to assert the metaphysical reality of group personality he (perhaps unsurprisingly given the implication of such an admission in a personalist metaphysic) draws back.

*Souls last longer than systems. Now history, in the large impersonal sense is a system by comparison with a soul. But yet even that history is not a mere evolution, not a mere series of phases, not a mere chain of phenomena. It is the evolution of something. It is something evolving. And it is an evolution that does not go in the way of nature, merely as a deeper complication and finer interaction of phenomena. The introduction of the idea of the group personality into history brings with it that action I have named of translation, the translation of an inner power into an outer phase. The form in which onward movement takes place is a series, not of phases, but of something far more - of decisions more or less free by an inner soul and will, self-assertions of the thing that abides. This is the feature of personality; and though*

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*it cannot be applied to history as a whole offhand, though humanity is not a great person, yet it holds of personality so far as that the great personalities are its great agents. When we are speaking of personal growth, therefore, and indeed of history altogether, whether individual or corporate, as distinct from the evolutionary pomp, we are in another category than natural process<sup>1</sup>.*

This is the furthest he takes the concept of group personality. Elsewhere he is more circumspect. Specifically he denies to the group personalities the capacity for immortality, of communion with God and of the healthful egoism: the acceptance of God-For-Us, that is, to some extent, appropriate to individuals<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless the concept of the group personality, or its parallel concepts "civilisation" "race" "nation" and "society" in Forsyth must be robust enough to make it possible for us to speak of Sin and Judgment in connection with them. If they are not, then much of Forsyth's approach to understanding evil falls to the ground.

There is indeed, Forsyth suggests, an analogy between God's way with the individual and God's way with history. The analogy should not be taken as a symmetry. God's chosen method with the individual is salvation through election and sorrow<sup>3</sup>. His chosen method with the group

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.46-7.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.21-22.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.163.

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and history is saving judgment<sup>1</sup>. Nations cannot receive a permanent election to salvation and are not immortal<sup>2</sup>. To this extent nations are less important, less permanent, and less real than individuals. By contrast individuals do necessarily come under saving judgment, no less than nations<sup>3</sup>. Because of Forsyth's personalism there cannot be a full symmetry between God's way with the individual and his way with the corporate. The ultimate goal is *universal salvation worked out by a method of particular election*<sup>4</sup>.

But the corporate is bound to be uppermost in the concerns of *The Justification of God*. The War is never far from Forsyth's thought in *The Justification of God*. It appears in the second sentence of the book, where Forsyth defends the use of so unfamiliar a word as Theodicy, *But it is hard to believe that the word can be so strange at a time when the passion for the thing has, by the magnitude of our present calamity, become for multitudes the keynote of their religion*<sup>5</sup>.

We can discern behind *The Justification of God*, even if we could not simply assume it from the circumstances in which the book was written, two questions about the nature of God's working with such corporate

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.176.
2. *The Justification of God*, p.21.
3. *The Justification of God*, p.166.
4. *The Justification of God*, p.165.
5. *The Justification of God*, Pref 1.

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entities in the world that relate to the War. Firstly, Why has God allowed this thing to happen? Why has he allowed the destruction of so much, and at a time when the powers of good has seemed to people to be so strong, allowed evil to reign? Secondly, Is God on our side, and if so, does that mean that we are sure of victory<sup>1</sup>? As we consider the nature of Forsyth's understanding of God's working in the corporate and in history, we must bear in mind the particular reason that he had for being concrete rather than vague. Saving Judgment is not only an intellectual category in a detached argument. It is an attempt to address a situation in which profound evil was combined with a disorienting disappointment.

If the significance of the corporate in theodicy is to be seen as in some way necessitated particularly by the circumstances under which Forsyth wrote, this is not to say that it is somehow in principle peripheral to his thought. The Cross, after all, *the greatest sin the world committed was a national and religious sin*<sup>2</sup>. That is to say, the cross is a corporate sin, and in Forsyth's understanding of the world, the closer you come to the cross the closer you come to the centre of things. Inevitably the work of theodicy must reflect this. *And no theodicy can meet the situation which does not see that the root of the trouble is in the whole of society, however it may come to a head in a*

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.103.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.178.



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*particular nation*<sup>1</sup>.

Much of Forsyth's discussion of saving judgment in connection with corporate entities or group personalities, consists of commentary on the proposition from Schiller *Das Weltgeschichte ist die Weltgericht* <sup>2</sup>.

Forsyth rejects, however, in connection with this phrase, any sense that the fundamental judgment of history lies in the inevitable out-working of the evil effects of evil acts upon those who wrought them. He points out, *The phrase suggests that judgment consists in no more than an event entails inevitably, by moral causation.....But by the time this comes home both sinner and saint are beyond its reach, and it falls on an innocent posterity*<sup>3</sup><sup>4</sup>.

We should note the following points about Forsyth's understanding of God's working in history. There is inevitably, as Forsyth is partly pointing out in the passage quoted above, a tension between what is just in relation a particular society or group, and what is just in relation to an individual member of this group<sup>5</sup>. God's work in history is

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1. *The Justification of God* Pg. 120.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.208.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.210.

4. Elsewhere, however Forsyth does write in a way that seems, at least, to complicate the understanding of the direct causality of God in judgment. *But He never judged them (sc the Jews) in the sense of avenging, far less revenging. Their judgment was the reaction on them, from God's holiness, of their fatal misconception of holiness, the recoil of their egoist and self-satisfied righteousness.*(*The Justification of God* Pg.208)

5. *The Justification of God*. Pg. 120

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something that is only to be discerned by the historical method of valuation. This means in principle that those who have not been created anew by the evangelical experience of redemption are not going to be able to see God's operation in the world. It is a working that controls the material world<sup>1</sup>. It is a working that may best be understood as the operation of a will in history, rather than the immutable operation of moral laws such as might be analogous to natural laws.

Forsyth does not neglect to give some historical examples of what he is proposing. He would insist of course that the understanding of the working of God does not depend upon the accuracy of a human understanding of a particular phase of history. His discussion of process and *telos* early in e.g. Metaphysic and Redemption would rule such dependence out.

It is striking, and perhaps illustrative of the difficulty of the position that Forsyth is seeking to defend, that the richest passage of such examples occurs in his discussion of the ironical aspect of History and Judgment. Irony has marked affinities to poetic justice, and the attraction of poetic justice is surely more that we feel that this is what should happen in response to evil, rather than that we believe it is what does happen.

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.53.

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The examples come so thick and fast in this section that I shall quote it at length: *Satan's last chagrin is his contribution to God's kingdom. The great agents of the divine purpose have often no idea of it. "Cyrus my servant", One thing they do with all their might, but God accomplishes by them quite another. Julius Caesar never intended nor conceived the Roman Church; but it came by him, and he was murdered. His ambition was his death, but his great function was a thing vaster than the Roman Empire. There is a certain truth (if we will be very careful with it) in the early Christian fantasy that Satan was fooled by the patient naivete of Christ. This is the irony of history-when the very success of an idea creates the conditions that belie it, smother it, and replace it. Catholicism becomes the Papacy. The care for truth turns to the Inquisition. The religious orders, vowed to poverty, die and rot of wealth. A revival movement becomes a too, too prosperous and egoist church. Freedom, as soon as it is secured becomes tyranny. A German defeat to-day would have begun with the victory of 1870, for which God was rapturously praised, and with the Siegestrunkenheit that started there<sup>1</sup>.*

We need also to note, on the election rather than the judgment side of the divine working in the world, the special place Calvinism<sup>2</sup>, and the British Puritan tradition<sup>3</sup>, enjoy in Forsyth's regard, as theocentric

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.214.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.82.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.95.

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religion, well adapted for carrying God's benign influence into society.

We have therefore a complex picture of God's operation in the world, including his use of bad and good human beings who do not know Christ, judgments in accordance with the justice of God, and those that go against that justice. It admits of the infliction of Judgment by Christ<sup>1</sup>, and by ironic recoil of evil. It admits of the use of the miraculous, and has a heavy emphasis on the influence of individuals over the group and the importance of the election of those individuals.

But election and judgment in individuals and society do not simply have the analogical similarities and dissimilarities I have mentioned. They have practical implications one for the other. What, we are bound to ask, of the individual soldier who finds himself part of an egoistical civilisation that is tearing itself apart?

*Certain it is that, if the Kingdom of God be the active, historic, moral and withal mystic and eternal thing the New Testament reveals, such neglect of it as modern society shows, and such repudiation of it as German nationality has deliberately made, must mean a judgment which our whole godless civilisation must feel, however we distribute the guilt. "Both good and bad endure one scourge, not because they are guilty of one disordered life, but because they do both too much affect this transitory life; not in like measure but both together." [Augustine,*

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.179.

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*City of God 1.6]*<sup>1</sup>.

*There is much mischievous nonsense talked about the welcome by Christ of the soldier, whatever his manner of life, who left all and followed the call of country to death on the field....the chief reward for such and act may be the gift of saving shame and repentance for the life it closed*<sup>2</sup>.

Forsyth is perfectly well aware that while we may sin as a group, the judgment the group undergoes is not likely to distribute itself in accordance with the distribution of guilt within that group. The chief victims of God's judgment of egoist civilisation are not its chief culprits. (He speaks unequivocally of the war as a judgment.)<sup>3</sup>.

This tension, this apparent injustice in judgment is the almost inevitable residuum of the practical and historical aspect in Forsyth's theodicy. For the moment it serves as a sharp reminder of the limits of what Forsyth is explicitly attempting to do. He rejects the notion of bringing God before the bar of human justice. He is trying to build confidence in the notion that all things (real, that is personal, things), in the end, however evil their course, will glorify, and be a glory to God. *What is judgment but the setting out in true and full*

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.105.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.158.

3. *The Justification of God*, p.120.

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*light... of the actual state of things between the soul's case and the ruling power of the world. Unless Christ be a dream or a dreamer, that power is God's grace*<sup>1</sup>. In the end, given Forsyth's understanding of the nature of theodicy, and the nature of our knowledge of God, the point that he needs to establish is not that the war and its effects are essentially just, but that it is conducive to the setting out of this relationship of dependence upon grace.

This lack of concern for justice would be intolerable if Forsyth were offering a trite comfort in connection with the questions that have been in the minds of the readers to whom *The Justification of God* was addressed. It may be perfectly proper to say that we can be sure for this or that reason of the ultimate justice of the divine order, and yet unable to discern the particular justice of a particular set of circumstances. It cannot be proper to combine such limited agnosticism with detailed reassurances of the divine will and purpose in those circumstances. Of course Forsyth does not offer such reassurances. If the world and the War is working to the setting out of this true relationship of God and man, then the collapse of a civilisation that did not express that proper relationship was inevitable<sup>2</sup>. Britain's participation in the false relationship has not been so slight that it can expect to escape that judgment, although she may have some

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.191-2.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.120.

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reasonable hope of being still useful to God<sup>1</sup>.

### 4.4 Futility and Contradiction

So far I have looked at two of the three sentences in which I attempted to sum up the underlying argument of *The Justification of God*: "All the evil and failure of the world was present, and finally dealt with, at Calvary", and "The way the world goes can only be understood in the light of God's way with the world, as revealed in the Cross.". We come now to the third of those sentences. "Attempts to understand the way the world goes which do not centre on God's moral and redemptive nature are doomed to futility and contradiction" We have been considering the way in which Forsyth believes God's judgment falls on corporate entities, such as civilisations, and I have pointed out that, for Forsyth, a civilisation that stands in the wrong relationship to God invites judgment. To misunderstand the proper relationship is to court disaster.

It follows that a first class disaster, such as the Great war, must be the result, on some level, and by some pattern of causality, of false understanding, of false faith. If the great war is a judgment, it is a judgment on an entire civilisation, and therefore on the patterns of belief, including inadequate patterns of faith, that sustain that civilisation.

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.103-4.

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This gives extra significance to what might otherwise seem a rather unnecessary element in *The Justification of God*. When Forsyth discusses what he takes to be failed patterns of thought, he is implicitly indicting them for a shared responsibility for the war that is the occasion for his writing. Attempts to understand the way the world goes which do not centre on God's moral and redemptive nature are doomed to futility and contradiction. They are aspects of a heedlessness that has had dire consequences. It is therefore appropriate that we should follow Forsyth's critique of failed patterns of thought to enable us to establish in some detail how he conceives the particular virtues of theocentric, theistic religion.

Chapters II to VII of *The Justification of God* have a dialectical structure that helps us in this enterprise. Structurally it is useful to perceive the pattern of Thesis, Antithesis, Synthesis, and observe how each move is driven by what Forsyth takes to be the nature of good or bad Theology even if our interest in what he has to say on these matters does not really lie in the cogency of his dismissal of the patterns of thought that he rejects. Delineating this structure enables us to understand Forsyth's positive thought more clearly, by establishing in some detail what he takes to be its negative or converse.

I am suggesting a pattern that runs as follows:

- 1) Thesis Optimistic teleologies dependent upon the security of process.
- 2) Antithesis Pessimistic teleologies dependent upon the security of



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process.

3) Synthesis Theistic teleologies dependent upon the accomplished *telos*. There follows an exposition of the centrality of the accomplished *telos* in the opening pages of Salvation Theological but not Systematic.

4) Thesis Anti-metaphysical religion.

5) Antithesis Chalcedonian religion.

There follows an exposition of the implications to the Church of its failure to find the synthesis of these two in The Failure of the Church as an International Authority.

6) Chapter VII may be taken as the Synthesis, Moral, Theistic Religion.

This rather complex pattern of argument needs to be set out in some detail, because it amounts to a general, if implicit, statement about the role of Theology and Christian culture, without which *The Justification of God* is difficult to comprehend. We shall concentrate on the patterns of thought that are criticised, rather than representing Forsyth's own positive proposals.

We start with Thesis: Optimistic teleologies dependent upon the security of process. This discussion is the central theme of Chapter II. This chapter includes a discussion in a fairly general way, of Hegelian thought, and the evolutionary optimism that characterises *inter alia* Lux Mundi. The rest of this chapter amounts to an explanation of the way in which these ways of understanding reality are unrealistic about the fundamental nature of the person, and about the possibility of security in process.

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The varieties of religion most obviously and directly challenged by the war are those dependent on the operation of a process taken to be implicit in the world, such as evolutionary teleology. Evolutionary teleologies perceive the *telos* of the world emerging through processes of development roughly similar to those outlined in scientific evolutionary theory<sup>1</sup>. The most influential accommodation of evolutionary teleology to Christianity was in *Lux Mundi*<sup>2</sup>. For Forsyth, evolutionary teleology is just a particular case of a more general pattern of thought that seeks, by induction from a particular known patch of history, a general understanding of an over-arching order in the world.

It is not Forsyth's intention to deny that evolution has taken place, or that processes are not significant in History. All that he seeks to demonstrate is that no process can represent an adequate basis for belief in an over-arching teleology. They are never really secure because they do not have their end fully present in their means. Evolutionary and Hegelian notions of process cannot be accepted as the basis of faith because they do not do justice to the fundamental nature of reality.

A central plank in Forsyth's rejection of process, and particularly process optimistically construed, as a basis for faith, is the

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.45.

2. Gore. C. (ed), *Lux Mundi*, (London: John Murray, 1889), p.181-214. Illingworth wrote the essays on evolution and suffering.

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observation that the scope of our investigations, the sample from which we might make our induction, is always too restricted. It is not possible to look at the particular period of history in which you happen to be living, or some other period of history which you happen to understand, and from those data alone come to an understanding of secure teleology operating in the world. Maybe you think you can perceive a long term trend in things which you are sure cannot be overturned and reversed, but this assurance may arise solely from ignorance. It is impossible for you to be sure that there are not trends that you have failed to perceive, or hidden disasters in the future for which you cannot make allowance, which will render the original tendencies and trends ineffectual<sup>1</sup>.

This observation applies to all varieties of teleology which rely on the working out through time of a process. There is however a variety of process which is not subject to this rule. A process may be sustained by its own dynamic. Its effects may seem sufficient to ensure its continued operation. To use a crude analogy, the explosion of the petrol in the cylinder of an engine provides sufficient energy at least to bring the engine round to the next such explosion. To an observer without full understanding this process may seem unstoppable, because one cannot imagine sufficient countervailing force to prevent the revolution. But the failure of spark plug or bearings will certainly prevent its operation.

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.41.

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On the other hand a process may be sustained because it is the working out of an accomplished fact. The motorcycle is slowing down, and to some observers it might be an open question whether it will stop, or begin to accelerate. But in fact the engine has seized up, and to that extent the process is secure.

This second analogy particularly is inadequate. One is not going to find, in time bound reality, a full analogy of the relationship between time and eternity that is implicit in the two pictures with which this chapter began. Some miracle, the nature of which we are not able to divine might overcome this problem with the motorbike. For a genuinely secure process we need an accomplished fact working itself out through time, which has within it, at the time of accomplishment, the overcoming of all subsequent resistance. If all subsequent resistance to the operation of the accomplished fact was summed up and present at the moment of accomplishment, then the out-working of that fact will be secure. We shall maintain that on the cross we have the point where the intransigence of all eternity was overcome<sup>1</sup>.

A teleology of this kind can be a secure teleology, one that in principle cannot be overcome, because it can in principle rest upon accomplished facts rather than on accomplishing process. The evidence for a simple process type of teleology, such as that of Optimistic Evolutionism may be past facts, but the security of the teleology must

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.44.

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rest in the process. It is not possible to find security in a process, since it is not possible to know what future circumstances may do to the operation of that process. Where the process is simply the accomplished end operating in history, and the means and the end are thus identical, then the teleology can be secure. Its security arises from the fact that it is based not upon a process, which might go astray, but upon a *telos* which is essentially already accomplished<sup>1</sup>.

Forsyth identifies two main faults with Optimistic teleologies. They depend upon essentially uncertain processes, and they are necessarily unrealistic about the moral nature of human beings. The uncertainty has been made more apparent by the war, which has shown that the sanguinary aspects of the evolutionary process have not been tamed. If civilisation is understood as one of the fruits of Process, then it is hard to understand the destruction of the War<sup>2</sup>. But in fact history, or for that matter evolution have never been truly and purely progressive. They have tended to the increase of complexity, with no guarantee of the increase of value<sup>3</sup>. The War is entirely compatible with this kind of evolution.

The misunderstanding of the moral nature of human beings can be illustrated, Forsyth suggests, by way of an example that lies close to the very heart of the evolutionary approach. When Evolutionary Optimists

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.50, 172.
2. *The Justification of God*, p.163-4.
3. *The Justification of God*, p.39-40.

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apply their principles to the Human Condition, they are obliged to use the same categories as those that are used in scientific evolutionary theory. They must speak of the birth, flourishing and death of individuals. All these are occurrences, and they thus build up a picture of the Human Condition which is basically that of a process finding expression in a series of occurrences. This may be a fair picture of the way that the world goes for plants and animals, but it is not true to our experience of the human life. We experience the beginning of human life not in the birth, but in the beginning of the operation of the will. Human life is the operation of that will, and death is experienced as the ending of the capacity for will. This is what it means for a thing to be a person<sup>1</sup>.

If we try and build a picture of a pattern working through time which does not take into account these vital perceptions of the nature of personality, then we falsify what History tells us. History, Forsyth maintains, now that it has become scientific, and thrown off the Hegelian dogma of the prime influence of the Idea, speaks of the operation and influence of personalities, and especially of classic personalities<sup>2</sup>.

Forsyth then turns from the discussion of optimistic teleologies to his Antithesis, Pessimistic teleologies dependent upon the security of

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.45.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.48.

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process.

This involves a discussion of a writer now largely forgotten, Edward von Hartmann, in Chapter III. As his thought is now almost entirely unfamiliar we need to remind ourselves of the outlines of his understanding of the world. Classical philosophical monism holds that subject and object are merely phases of an abstract, unlimited and impersonal consciousness called, in Absolutism the absolute. Another version called Solipsism holds that the existence of not-self, and other minds is a vulgar error. All types of monist reject naive realism, which they refer to as the "copy theory".

Pessimistic monism such as that of von Hartmann, holds that Volition has by its nature an excess of pain over pleasure. Volition is responsible for the "that", the existence, rather than the nature of the world. The logical aspect, the all-wisdom, of the Unconscious Idea cannot act directly as it is itself in bondage to the will. It seeks its remedy in consciousness, dissipating the will into individuation, so that separate tendencies can turn against each other. Its guidance of this process eventually enables the hurling back of volition, and of this process, into nothingness. This hurling back requires the cooperation of individuals. Such cooperation is only likely when a significant proportion of those individuals have come to recognise the illusory nature of the search for happiness. This in turn is only likely when most people have had the opportunity to prosecute that search for themselves far enough to make the illusion plain. Pessimistic monists

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maintain that the desirability under their system of granting all the means of their disillusion amounts to the basis for a strong practical ethic. In this fashion the logical element ensures that this is the best possible world, one that attains the redemption of non-existence, rather than being perpetuated endlessly<sup>1</sup>.

Obviously Pessimistic monism does not collapse in face of real evil. It may surprise us, however, that Forsyth chooses to discuss a writer who, even at the time of the Great War, was not well known in this country. Forsyth praises the thought of von Hartmann<sup>2</sup>, because he believes the pessimistic understanding of the world is realistic in terms of individual person-ality. Forsyth believes that Pessimistic monism represents a teleology which aims to combine the redemptive concept of Christianity with the monistic concept of contemporary philosophy. It seeks its security in the operation of an immanent, deep seated teleology, which is (given the nature of consciousness and volition) necessarily not conscious.

Forsyth uses the highly metaphysical nature of von Hartmann's thought as a jumping off point for a highly condensed piece of metaphysical argument. By so doing, he gives us an important clue to enable us to answer the question, "Why does he want to tell us about von Hartmann, who must have been fairly obscure, even in Forsyth's day?". The answer

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1. "Pessimism", *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, (New York 1911) Vol 11 p.741

2. *The Justification of God* Pg.57



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is that von Hartmann's thought represented an attempt to achieve a unified conception of reality that was not unrealistic about evil, one in which, as in which, as in Forsyth's own thought, evil is not "just a problem"<sup>1</sup>.

It is worth spending a little time looking at this argument, because it helps to indicate the richness of Forsyth's metaphysical thought. It is also the place where Forsyth argues most clearly for the identity of means and end in God's operation in the world, which I have suggested is the implication of the "two pictures" in which I have attempted to encapsulate his theodicy.

This condensed argument seems to run as follows <sup>2</sup>: In order to speak of a reality that is overcoming all opposition and permeating all things as a teleology it is necessary to speak in metaphysical terms. Philosophic agnosticism will not permit us any kind of secure teleology. We need a philosophy of totality, a philosophy which allows us to speak in very general terms about the nature of reality if we are going to continue to discuss the possibility of a victorious underlying teleology.

It is not possible for us now to rest content, however, with the old

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1. W.L. Bradley *P.T. Forsyth, The Man and His Work* London, Independent Press, 1952, suggests that Forsyth's interest in German pessimism may reflect the influence of his mentor and teacher Fairbairn. It is worth remembering that Forsyth's early intellectual development had been decidedly liberal (Cf. *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, Pg. 281.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.58f.

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metaphysic of substance. The metaphysic of substance speaks only of pervasive but static being. Being, or substance, was conceived as the thing that all things that exist share. It is really a universal. But a universal is not the same thing as a whole. It is possibly a category rather than a thing, and even if it is a thing then it is a very thin and general thing like ether.

However it is not merely a metaphysic of substance which we must abandon as outdated, but any attempt at a metaphysic of thought alone. Thought, as the fundamental nature and basis of all that is lacks the dynamism and creativity of the whole that we in fact perceive. Hegel's idealism is a fair criticism of the metaphysic of substance, and is progress indeed, but it must be regarded as merely an aspect of the metaphysic of *energy*. The most fundamental nature of all things is not being, or thought, but energy.

The following things must be said about energy as the fundamental nature of existence. Energy continually makes the inert energetic. An energetic metaphysic, as opposed to an ontological one, or an idealism that is not an idealism of energy will seek to develop a notion not of a rarefied universal, nor of self-organising being, but of a living whole. That is, energy in its different aspects working together. Under these circumstances the value of a new theory or hypothesis will be calculated not by its good relationship with other theories and hypotheses, but by its ability to work, to make a difference. Where energy is the deep nature of the universe it makes sense that theories should be judged,

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as to their reality, by their own energetic properties. Theories, after all, are part of the universe themselves<sup>1</sup>.

We must remember, however, that we are looking not just for the fundamental nature of reality, but for the teleology of that reality. *Energetic Idealism* may be a fair description of our manner of thought about the former, but it is not sufficiently precise for the latter. The fundamental breach is a moral breach. A moral order may be an impersonal thing, so the process for its healing, in the old substantial metaphysic might also be impersonal. But when we are talking about energy and movement it is not quite the same. A movement may be good, if it is impersonal, it may have great utility, but it cannot be moral. We have indicated above that for a secure teleology the *telos* and the teleology must be the same, the means and the end must be the same. Since the *telos* is moral in nature, since the *telos* is a moral healing, the means, the teleology, must also be moral. This in turn requires that the process should be one of moral action.

To put this point another way. For security our end and means in teleology must be identical. Our end is moral. Our means are action and movement. Moral action and movement are the exclusive preserve of persons. We can therefore take our stand on a particular form of

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1. Rodgers (Op.Cit) Pgs. 270-271 provides a useful pedigree for this very condensed argument. He indicates that Forsyth takes his sense of action, movement, becoming, life and the significance of the historical from Bergson, Eucken, and James, and his sense of the tragic in life from Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and von Hartmann.

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energetic idealism, which is personal idealism.

This in turn gives us two options. We may accept solipsism, or we may reject it. To accept solipsism would be to agree that there is a fundamental moral breach in the universe, and to seek a *telos* and teleology in terms of energetic idealism, but to identify the most fundamental energy working by moral means to that end as oneself, putting aside any notion of the existence of other personalities. Formally there is nothing against this picture, but we may safely leave it on one side.

If we reject solipsism, on the other hand, we have a picture of the fundamental nature of the universe as the domain of personalities, both as means and end, that is, a picture of the soul, conscience and society. Each personality is an end, and they all find their end of ends in God. Christ stands out among these ends, because, as God and as redeemer he is both end and means of all the individual ends and means that compose the universe.

The objection to pessimistic monism as a teleology is, therefore, that it fails to comprehend the role of the personal as *telos*, even though it gives due weight to the significance of the personal in the process of the healing of the moral order. Forsyth believes it is a valuable humanisation of Hegelian idealism, but, by mistaking both the *telos* and the significance of the relationship between the *telos* and the teleology it presents a teleology which is neither secure, nor a true picture of

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what is actually happening.

In his discussion of optimistic and pessimistic teleologies, Forsyth has come up with a common diagnosis. They both fail because they depend for their security upon the allegedly unstoppable nature of the process that they describe. This, Forsyth maintains, is simply inadequate. We must remember, of course, if this seems a rather cavalier dismissal of whole patterns of thought, the particular role of certainty in Forsyth's discussion. A very secure and apparently unstoppable process just is not the same thing as an already completed event working its way out in history, and no matter how close they might appear to come, it must be a mistake to try and present such a process as an adequate re-presentation in time of such a completed event.

Forsyth therefore takes us on to his Synthesis, Theistic teleologies dependent upon the accomplished *telos*. The discussion of this is to be found in Chapter IV. At first glance (Forsyth argues) pantheism is a genuine synthesis, and by any standards it is part of the whole view of religion. But it is inadequate. This we can discover by using a refined version of the criticism already developed. Like optimistic teleologies it is too little moral. It is wholes rather than souls that it worships<sup>1</sup>. Like pessimistic monism it depends upon the importation of an external personality

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.70.

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Forsyth's argument seems to run as follows <sup>1</sup>: Hope for the world must take the form of hope for its redemption. The nature of the world is fundamentally personal, and therefore the breach in its order is to be thought of as fundamentally a moral breach. The end of a moral breach must be a moral reconciliation. Since the means and the end must be the same, the means of the reconciliation must also be moral.

As we become more aware of the reality of the sin and suffering of the world, it becomes more apparent that the only *telos* that can fit this problem is a redemption. That is to say that no melioristic operation of worldly processes will bring things to a state that is satisfactory. The end thus attained could not justify the means to attain it. The attainment of a satisfactory *telos* will require something much more radical, much more eschatological than that.

Pessimistic Monism represents a serious attempt to indicate how such a *telos* might be achieved even though the world as it is were held to be incapable of being subdued to any valuable end. If this will not stand up, then we are left with a picture of some active and decisive power operating in the world, subduing its chaotic and discordant state.

There are two basic pictures of this subduing power. Either it is conceived as immanent and pantheistic, or it is conceived as transcendent and personal. To experience the world as the domain of the

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.67f.

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former kind of power is to perceive a unity suffusing the totality of all relations. The relativity, personalness and agony of individual existence have their own destruction inherent in them, and are brought towards the unity of the whole. All sin and suffering are being subdued in the infinite.

Forsyth suggests that this represents a genuine answer to the question *How is it possible to believe that the world is ordered to an end?* The emergence of timeless and absolute being is a part of the religious experience of many people. It is implicit in this picture that the unity is a fact coming to fruition rather than merely a process seeking its conclusion. It is unreality becoming reality, rather than reality becoming something that it is not. It would certainly be possible to draw up a picture of the operation of the teleology to this *telos* in which crisis had its characteristic part, and, provided that personalness were construed more in terms of what the absolute *might be*, than in terms of what real people *actually are*, the teleology could be reconciled with a metaphysic of personal idealism.

But while Pantheistic redemptive religion may fulfil formally the criteria for a teleology of the world that we have been developing, it is in fact a philosophically and morally tenuous construct. It would be hard, Forsyth maintains, for the believer to defend himself from the charge that the unity which he perceives is in fact an imposition from the unity of his own personality. As a matter of practical moral experience, believing in this mode makes less difference, sets the

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believer less free, than the alternative, which we shall discuss in the next section. It is possible to understand the immorality of Germany in terms of its identification of value with wholes, to the exclusion of the value of the individual person. Within the context of a metaphysic of personal idealism, pantheism, for all its initial impressiveness rapidly becomes morally drowsy, rather than energetic.

This leaves the ground clear for Forsyth's exposition of the virtues of the moral-theistic version of theistic faith, which has been the subject of much of this chapter. Following this we find an exposition of the centrality of the accomplished *telos* in the opening pages of Salvation Theological but not Systematic.

Having completed one cycle of the dialectical structure that I have been emphasising, a cycle that has taken Forsyth well outside the bounds of Christian doctrine, it seems to me that Forsyth brings a similar dialectical analysis to the failure of the churches adequately to address the needs of his age. If evolutionary optimism, pessimistic monism, and pantheism can be held up as examples of the moral and spiritual failure of the civilisation Forsyth understands to be under judgment, then the same can be said of what he takes to be the dominant species of Christianity in his age.

Just as the previous dialectical cycle began with something that would have appeared familiar and positive to Forsyth's readers, so Forsyth opens this new pattern of argument with something which he clearly



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believed was close to home for many of his readers. His Thesis is the Anti-metaphysical religion of his age<sup>1</sup>. The free churches in particular have espoused a kind of religion which is hostile to Theology, and lays strong emphasis on action. It expends considerable energy in activities which it regards as aspects of the Love of God working in the world. The teleology to which it may be connected is precisely this. God's love is working through human affections and human actions to bring all things to their *telos*.

The basic point, that the root of the teleology of the world is the Love of God, Forsyth agrees is sound. The problem is that the necessary element in God's love that comes from his holiness tends to be forgotten, and in consequence a very distorted picture of the operation of God's love tends to be built up. It is this distorted picture which fails to fulfil either of the criteria for a teleology which we outlined in the first section.

If you have a concept of God's love which is separated from any particular concept of his conscience or his holiness, then it is possible to imagine that his love finds expression in the spreading of the things that seem good to the human conscience. The steady spread of such things may be thought of as the prime example and evidence of the love and power of God.

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.82-85.

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Because it identifies the operation of the love of God with this kindly spreading of the love of humankind this view of the teleology of the world is very vulnerable to the reversal of that process. When the schemes of kindly endeavour fall to the ground, and they inevitably do with the War, the teleology is left shattered.

Because the Love of God is Holy, that is because it is infused with His moral passion, a necessary aspect of it is Judgment. God does not judge, as those who represent Anti-Theological Activism might believe, as a way of bringing about good. (As a parent might pretend to be angry as a way of discouraging a child from doing something dangerous.) He judges because he is good, and detests evil. Crises in history often are the effects of this judgment.

Any teleology, to be plausible, must contain an aspect of judgment. It is part of Forsyth's criticism of teleologies of process that we discussed in the previous section, that faith in the operation of a process is always vulnerable to the frustration of that purpose, and the inability of Anti-Theological Activism to understand the War is a case in point. One cannot rule out in advance any kind of crisis in History, or any kind of judgment. There is nothing so bad that it cannot happen to humankind. Nor can there be any kind of security without atonement. In order to be secure, therefore, it is necessary that judgment should be part of the inner dynamic of the teleology. If judgment is the way that the bringing of things to their *telos* works, then unimagined crisis and judgment do not threaten the teleology, but rather promote it.

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If the love of God is not inevitably connected with judgment, then it cannot coexist with crises. A teleology based upon such love would be plausible only so long as steady progress in the operation of human affections seemed to persist. It has not persisted, and therefore this teleology cannot be true.

Forsyth opposes to the anti-theological activism of the free churches what he presents as its Antithesis, Chalcedonian religion<sup>1</sup>. This is the "catholic" opposition to the kind of religion just criticised. Where Anti-Theological Activism identifies the Gospel (that is, the good news of a secure teleology) with saving activity, tradition propositional metaphysical religion identifies the Gospel with a scheme of truth. The prime example of this might be the Athanasian Creed. It is not the content of this, as a creed, that is objectionable. It is the assertion that salvation is primarily a matter of believing this scheme of truth, and damnation best thought of as the consequence of failure so to believe.

The teleology that this type of religion supports bases itself on the Incarnation. The Incarnation provides a metaphysical structure for a notion of baptismal regeneration which is itself primarily metaphysical rather than moral. You thus have a teleology which is somewhat akin to magic, working to a *telos* of which the individual can have no adequate experience, since it is conceived in terms of a substantial change,

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.85-93.

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rather than a moral or personal one.

This results in a most unfortunate picture of the Christian career. A Christian accepts a scheme of truth on the authority of another, a theologian from the past or a teacher in the present. He then *descends* to whatever experience he may himself have of the operation of the Gospel, in himself and in others. He may attempt to believe, but cannot be sure, that this is the moral correlate of a more fundamental and mysterious change in substance.

The objections to this variety of teleology are of a different kind from those to the teleologies we have discussed so far. As already indicated, it is not the content which renders this an inadequate solution to spiritual vagrancy, but the mode of apprehension.

It may very well be, Forsyth argues, that the Athanasian Creed represents, within the metaphysics of the period, a description of a vital aspect of the teleology, secure and true, which is bringing the world to its *telos*. No doubt in the patristic period thought such as this did arise from the experience of the Gospel working in lives. Now it does not. Because it does not arise from experience, it cannot attain any real purchase on the soul. It offers no means of understanding, or coping with crisis, and thus, at a time like the War, no means of interpreting experience. Failing to do this it fails to protect the individual from that vagrancy.

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From this discussion we carry forward a further lesson. The teleology, if it is to be credible in a crisis, must have its roots in life and in experience, however it may find its expression, and systematisation, in propositions. Forsyth seems to imply that a middle way must be sought between the Anti-Theology of the Free Churches, and the propositional Theology of the Catholic Churches.

There follows an exposition of the implications to the Church of its failure to find its true note, in The Failure of the Church as an International Authority.

Chapter VII may be taken as the Synthesis, Moral, Theistic Religion. It is interesting to note that the thesis or antithesis in each case is rejected in part either because it is morally unrealistic or because it is inadequately rational. Within the first synthesis there is a discussion of pantheistic and transcendent theistic belief, and the former is disparaged, but not completely rejected on the grounds of partial failure in each of these areas. In addition Process is rejected as grounds for theodicy because it is intellectually and morally insecure, and the two forms of religion discussed in the second part of the pattern are rejected because they have failed to take an intellectual and moral grip on humanity.

Theocentric faith, based on the evangelical experience, working itself out in terms of a personalist metaphysic, Forsyth is arguing, evades these criticisms.

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Underlying this pattern of argument it is fairly easy to discern the fundamental contours of the evangelical experience as Forsyth understands it. Because that experience is moral, in the sense of being in the domain of morality, rather than, for example, aesthetics, understandings of the world that are fully satisfactory to a redeemed person must be morally realistic. Because the experience is characterised by certainty, such understandings must enshrine or encapsulate that certainty. Because the experience has a certain content (that is, it is an experience of personal indefectible redemption as the gift of a person) such an understanding must be made conceivable in personalist terms.

### 4.5 The Search for Integration

I suggested at the beginning of this examination of the dialectical structure of much of Forsyth's criticism of what he took to be failed patterns of thought, that his discussion amounts to a general, if implicit, statement about the role of Theology and Christian culture, without which *The Justification of God* is difficult to comprehend. In attempting to make good this assertion I have emphasised the way that Forsyth homes in on what he takes to be the lack of full moral seriousness, or the lack of realism in the patterns of thought that he criticises.

The purpose, of course, of Forsyth's discussion, and of mine, is to bring out, by contrast, the virtues that Forsyth discerns in the

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metaphysical, personal, experiential, certainty of theocentric faith based upon the cross. The capacity to combine within one pattern of thought the most pessimistic diagnosis of the human condition, and the most securely optimistic prognosis for God's universal project, is required, Forsyth is suggesting, for any faith or belief which aspires to such moral seriousness and realism. The capacity to combine a full commitment to action in the world with a full metaphysical integration of faith and experience is required to make any such faith or belief effective. The basis of Forsyth's belief, and of the argument of *The Justification of God*, is the integration of this optimism and pessimism, in an effective metaphysical personal experiential certainty, in the evangelical experience of redemption through the Cross.

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#### Farrer's Doctrine of created autonomy and Divine responsibility in a Causal Web

#### 5.1 Balancing Freedom and Contingency

In one sense, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is a reworking and extension of the freewill defence. The core of the freewill defence is the contention that a significant proportion of the evils of this world are a necessary consequence of the freewill that God has granted to human beings, and that the value of this freewill far outweighs the significance of the evil.

There are two distinctive elements to Farrer's argument, if he is considered as a protagonist of the freewill defence. The first is his systematic extension of some kind of concept of freedom to all levels of creation. It is probably confusing to try and think in terms of the valuable freewill of a tree, but Farrer may be said to argue for the valuable capacity of a gourd or a worm to flourish, or fail to flourish,



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in accordance with its own constitution and formal properties, irrespective of a Prophet's need for protection from the sultry sun.

The second is his careful balancing of that notion of freedom with the notion of contingency. It would be fair to say, perhaps, that freewill defences have an unfortunate side effect. By emphasising the valuable separation of God and Man, they can seem to make God irrelevant, if not to the ultimate destiny and purpose of human nature, at least to its immediate purposes and experience. One might reasonably expect his extension of the freewill defence to all levels of creation, therefore, to give Farrer's Theology a firmly non-interventionist character.

This does not seem to me to be the way that the argument of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* tends. Much of Farrer's argument is constructed around the concept of the independence of constitutions, but this is balanced by the framework of contingency and multiple causation within which that independence is exercised. God makes a difference to the way the world is, in a way that is analogous to the way that being alive makes a difference to collocation of sap, cellulose etc, that we call a tree. Of course God, the First Cause, is not simply another cause among causes, but, in the argument of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* God is a contriving and effective cause. Things would happen differently if God did not choose them to happen thus and so.

It is the relationship between these two distinctive elements, (the extension of freedom to all levels of creation, and the balance of

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independence and contingency) that is the subject of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. If God is the First Cause, an active cause, within a free creation, what is his relationship to the evil in that creation?

God's is a contriving will, contriving in the context of entities that are genuinely independent, and yet contingent; dependent for the completion of their causal inadequacy upon the First Cause. It seems to follow that there are two things that Farrer must be able to demonstrate, or at least indicate, about any particular evil, firstly, that it arises from the operation of valuable entities exercising their independent agency, and secondly, that it goes neither against justice (i.e. what is due to that entity), nor against the constitution of the entity undergoing it.

These can perhaps be stated a little more formally. Firstly on independent agency: A created entity, apart from the most fundamental particles (whatever those turn out to be) is an ongoing system organised out of more simple entities. An entity is an agent in its own right when it is acting in accordance with its own formal properties or constitution, that is, when it is acting in accordance with its own internal organisation. [These properties are formal in that they *form* the entity, causing it to be the kind of thing it is.] An example of a bad sort, if such could be conceived, would not require such respect. (Farrer strenuously denies that any kind of entity can in itself be a bad kind or sort. It may be bad for the health and happiness of others, but in itself it must be reckoned to be good.) A genuinely independent

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exemplification of a good sort must behave according to that sort, that is according to its formal properties.

Secondly, on Justice: Justice is a principle which governs the relations of entities, where the principle of independent agency deals primarily with their internal operation. The requirement for justice applies primarily to sentient creatures, and may be understood as one of the goods appropriate to their constitution. One of the most significant aspects of the constitutions that God has created is that he has created them as true, independent individual realities. It would not therefore be in accordance with justice to seek the justification for the existence of a particular individual or class of individuals in the benefit that they bring to other entities. For example, if it is misery, characteristically, to be a rabbit, and rabbits are a sort which God has created, it is no justification for their existence that they provide food and entertainment for foxes. These considerations may be part of the fox's good, but they imply nothing towards the justification of the existence of rabbits.

Similarly, when we consider the suffering of an individual, justice requires that the natural beneficiary of that suffering should be the individual suffering. It is not justified simply by pointing to the value that suffering has to other individuals. For example, it is good that a dog should learn to be wary of a bull, by seeing another dog tossed. But you cannot justify the suffering of the dog that is tossed solely in terms of its educational value to others. If that is all that

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can be said for the suffering of the tossed dog, then that suffering would be unjust.

As I have suggested, when *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is considered as a variety of freewill defence, it would be possible to emphasise the elements of independence in creation to an extent that would make the *Love Almighty* element in Farrer's title seem inappropriate. Farrer does not do this. He is committed to an understanding of God's relationship with the world that entails a very specific kind of control.

*God would never have allowed evils to subsist in his creation, were it not that he might find in them the occasion to produce good things unique in kind, and dependent for their unique character on the character of the evils in question*<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to the two tests above, therefore, to sustain this principle, Farrer must be able to demonstrate that any particular evil: That a good may come of it different in kind from those available without evil.

As human beings we retain a somewhat anthropocentric agenda for the understanding of God's way with the world, and it is reasonable to add another element to the things that it is necessary for Farrer to demonstrate of any particular evil: That it does not frustrate God's

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.163

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purpose in making rational loving beings for his own communion.

This leaves us with four considerations that Farrer's argument needs to address in connection with any particular evil. They are the considerations of the independence of the agents concerned, the justness and appropriateness of the suffering and evil involved, God's capacity to bring a specific variety of good out of the evil, and the compatibility of the evil with the project of making loving rational beings for communion with God.

Farrer's argument has a considerable number of digressions, which it is not my intention to work into this reconstruction. Although they are interesting in themselves, and certainly have bearing on the problem of evil, it seems appropriate to draw out what I take to be the most systematic strand in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. In what follows I shall to some extent keep to Farrer's central structure, the progressive discussion of levels of constitution. However, in the light of the considerations I have proposed as Farrer's underlying criteria, I shall try to show for each level how each of the four points just mentioned are addressed.

### 5.2 Constitutions and their Evils

Evil, Farrer maintains, is the spoiling of good things. This is not an empirical, but a logical claim. In order to judge something evil we must judge it by a standard. We must say : X is of such and such a sort, and

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a bad or spoiled example of that sort<sup>1</sup>.

All entities must be seen as members of a class, or sort, which is in itself good, and which provides a standard by which that entity may be judged a good or bad example. If we come across something which does not seem to belong to any such class the chances are that *either* it is not an entity, but a malfunction which man has hypostatized, *or* that we are confusing the question of whether a sort is good in itself with the question of whether it is good for some thing or end which we hold dear. An example of a malfunction hypostatized would be lumbago. An example of a thing good in itself, but bad for something we hold dear would be a weed.

In becoming part of an animal a piece of matter does not lose its own formal properties as material. Similarly, when God, through evolution, brings it about that there is a rational animal, Man, that animal retains the aspects of its formal properties that derive from its being material and animal. This is a fact which we observe everyday, and does not need argument. As material I fall like any other material body. As animal I eat, like any other animal body, be I never so rational<sup>2</sup>.

Since, however, our understanding of the appropriateness of evil (or good) is dependent upon our understanding of the formal properties of

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.21-31

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.106

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the entity causing or suffering the evil, Farrer proposes that we take the evils we discuss in the correct order, starting with lifeless matter, going via organic and animal to rational constitution.

By material constitution or constitutions, Farrer means entities organised solely in accordance with the properties of the fundamental particles of existence. It may take considerable and complex interactions of such properties to produce, for instance, granite, but it takes nothing more than this<sup>1</sup>. Organic constitutions however, have that extra level of organisation which we call life expressing itself through the material constitution, and seeking to assimilate the whole material world to its own organisation<sup>2</sup>. Animal constitution has both material and organic constitution, with that extra level of organisation which amounts to perception, creating, in the animal, a world view. At the animal level, of course, the world view is entirely oriented round the self and its organisation<sup>3</sup>. Rational constitution adds to this the level of organisation called thought, enabling a perception of the world not sheerly centred round self<sup>4</sup>.

The concept of a constitution is so important to Farrer's argument, that it is vital to understand what he means by it. To take once again the

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p. 32

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p. 50

3. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.81

4. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.109-110

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example of a human being. We have at least four constitutions, material, organic, animal and rational. Each constitution operates fully in accordance with its formal properties. For example, when the rational constitution commands the hand to move, the animal constitution has its system of nerves and muscles fully adequate to the task. If it did not then no amount of willing on the part of the rational constitution would make the arm move. It is because of this co-operation of all the levels of an entity in accordance with their own constitution, that they represent a single identity.

On the other hand, no level or organisation operates solely in accordance with its own constitution either. Because of the organic and animal qualities of my arm, the matter in it does things that are in accordance with its formal constitution, but which it might not do on its own. Similarly, my living breathing animal constitution responds to the rational faculty.

### 5.3 Stars and Crystals: The Material Constitution

We shall look first of all at material constitution. Farrer argues that matter as such is not to be conceived as undergoing either good or evil. Elementary particles, atoms, in themselves, so long as they are organised solely in accordance with their own formal properties, do not know good or evil. This is fairly obvious in the case of an individual particle. We cannot imagine commiserating with it, or deploring what has happened to it. It is not so immediately obvious when we consider



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material things organised in accordance solely with the formal properties of material, but on a fairly large scale, such as a star, or a crystal. Explosion, we may feel, is bad for the star, and crushing is bad for the crystal.

But in becoming a star or a crystal an aggregate of matter does not achieve a new kind of unity which amounts to a constitution, that could be respected or frustrated. They have no new level of organisation operating with regularities and possibilities only available with such a level of organisation. Such "things" are merely the combined operation of their constituent parts, not true entities in their own right. Therefore the dispersal, or reorganisation of the matter from which they are constructed, although it may appear to destroy an entity, in fact amounts to nothing more than the dissolution of an aggregate which we have seen fit to hypostatise as an entity. A crystal or a star is no more a true entity than a fire. One may regret their dissolution because of the good they could achieve, but one cannot regret their dissolution for their own sakes, since they are not really "things", entities, in the first place, but orderly aggregates<sup>1</sup>.

When Farrer comes to discuss higher entities and their imperfections he makes it clear that a considerable proportion of these imperfections arise either from the operation of lower levels of constitution in those entities, in accordance with their formal properties, or from the

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.32-33

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operation of other entities in accordance with their formal properties. But material, in the sense in which we are discussing it here, has no lower levels of constitution; nor, at the point of creation, are there other entities which might interfere with its operation.

This does not mean that God is not constrained by anything when he chooses the formal properties of matter. It remains the case, in the operation of God's power in the creation of the most fundamental matter, that it must be a creation of full agents, governed by the power of God to bring good out of evil, and a suitable substrate for the creation of loving, rational, independent beings. Provided these conditions are satisfied, however, (and we shall see some arguments to suggest that they are), then God is free in his choice of the formal properties of matter. If this is true, since God is good and wise, those formal properties can in no way themselves be causes of the imperfections in the formal constitutions of more complex entities. It is useless to look for the cause of organic imperfections in the inappropriateness in principle of basic matter to act as substrate for organic, animal and rational constitutions. God was constrained in his choice of materials for creation, but solely by his desire to create materials fit for this very purpose<sup>1</sup>.

### 5.4 Vegetables and Beyond: The Physical Constitution

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.48

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We have seen Farrer's contention that there is no good or evil to be thought of as undergone by lifeless matter aggregated solely in accordance with its own formal properties. The possibility of evil comes in with the higher levels of organisation which we shall be discussing. When you have a constitution organising matter not solely in accordance with the formal properties of that matter, then you have the possibility of the frustration or flourishing of that constitution. A tree may flourish and spread to become an entire forest, or it may languish with disease and die without progeny. These may reasonably be thought of as evil and good respectively.

All physical evil may be seen as the maladjustment of the relationship, the interference, between different systems operating in accordance with their own formal properties. The interference between systems in this way may be called "physical accident". For example, a tree struggling and failing to overcome the competition of its neighbours, or the inadequacy of its soil, or a man's desire to turn it into timber, is suffering from an interference between its formal properties, and those of other entities<sup>1</sup>.

Given that this is so, we must enquire whether it may be seen to be compatible with the criteria for a picture of the operation of God's power given above. Does the operation of physical accident frustrate God's purpose in making loving rational beings for his own communion? It

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.50

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will be clear that it does not completely frustrate that purpose in that there are such beings. If it were the case that death were a complete end to the rational beings that suffer it then it might be thought that some physical accidents represented a permanent frustration of God's purpose in connection with individuals intended for his communion. But this is not the case. It is part of Farrer's argument that God can and will remake rational beings of a permanent substance, after death.

Were it the case the God has to accept his rational beings in the state in which they die, then physical accident taking the form of brain damage to previously rational and loving beings would represent a frustration of God's purpose. But God must be able to recreate the rationality and lovingness of beings irrespective of their state at death, or he would lose all who died by stages, under torture, (or even in their sleep)<sup>1</sup>. This is a subject to which we shall return when we come to consider rational constitution. The other way in which physical accident might be thought to frustrate God's purpose in this respect is through the morally degenerative effects of pain. This we shall look at, at a later stage.

Does physical accident arise from the operation of valuable entities exercising their agency? There seem to be two fundamental possibilities for God should he decide to do away with physical accident. He could do

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.178

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away with organic constitution altogether<sup>1</sup>, or he could bring it about that organic constitutions never damaged each other. (He could do this by bringing it about that they ceased to operate when they clashed, or never found themselves in circumstances in which they did clash)<sup>2</sup>. Farrer has therefore to show that entities obtain their valuableness from their organic constitution, and accidentality is either an essential part of organic constitution, or an essential part of its value.

There is a certain absurdity, Farrer maintains, to pretending to raise the question of whether an organic constitution is valuable. We are organic beings, and cannot find it in ourselves to desire to be anything else<sup>3</sup>. This being the case we cannot seriously doubt the value of organic constitution. We only raise the question about evil if we are believers. If we are believers then we bless God for our existence. But we can only conceive of our existence as organic. Therefore we cannot question the value of organic constitution.

We can, however, he suggests, attempt to offer some indication of why organic constitution, so obviously valuable to us, as we are, is also sufficiently valuable to God to justify his use of it to make us this way. The following are two suggestions:

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.60
2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.52
3. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.61

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God desires to create. His power is infinite, and no circumstances stand in the way of his creating. On the other hand his desire to create is infinite, so long as what he creates is not evil in itself, that is, by nature, evil. Let us assume, for the moment that it is a feature of spiritual constitution that it always behaves in accordance with God's will for it. Having created all the beings with a spiritual constitution that he can, or that he wants (possibly an infinite number), there is no reason why he should be satisfied. There are other kinds of constitutions. We know of at least two, the material and the organic. The organic constitution is not as good as the spiritual, in that it has this unfortunate capacity for not being in accordance with God's will. Nevertheless, it is not evil in itself. The sum of creation will be the better for its existence. If this is so, it is sufficiently valuable for God to create it<sup>1</sup>.

Farrer is not satisfied with this way of understanding God's purpose in creating organic constitutions<sup>2</sup>. It makes little sense, he suggests, to think of God turning to the creation of organic constitutions because he has run out of other kinds of constitution to create.

He therefore proposes an alternative and supplementary way of understanding the value of organic constitution: God desires that there should be loving rational beings for communion with him. For there to be

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.65-66

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.68

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such beings, it is plausible that they must be sufficiently abstracted from God to be capable of being unaware of him and his nature. A being which is from the first fully aware of God and his nature will never achieve the independence necessary for the establishment of its selfhood. Something so close to God could only really be a mirror of God, not a being loving him.

There is nothing which can stand between a spirit and God, since both are spiritual by nature. The spirit has no organs to mislead or distract it. If it fails to respond directly and immediately to God, then this could only be because its intellect is created incapable of doing so, or is darkened and confused by God. Neither seems a very attractive alternative as a pattern for God's action. How much better to create beings which are not by nature immediately aware of God, but whose intellect struggles steadily to a knowledge of him. An organic rational entity, on a material substrate, seems to fit this bill.

To put this another way, if God wishes to create, then he must create something other than himself. If he wishes there to be something godlike, and yet not God, he must make something of a completely different nature as their substrate in order to ensure that they can be things truly other than himself. For this reason the nature of the substrate must be truly independent of God in its operation, since it is the principle of the independence of the godlike creatures. For this

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reason organic constitution is valuable<sup>1</sup>.

Both these approaches suggest that organic constitution is valuable. In the first case this is in spite of, and in the second, because of its capacity for being not in accordance with God's will. If organic constitution in general can be valuable in spite of the possibility of being not in accordance with God's will, then particular organic constitutions can be valuable in spite of this possibility.

We might ask, however, whether despite this possibility in organic constitution, God should have brought it about that it never occurred in organic constitutions. Accept that matter perfectly expresses God's will by being itself and independent of God to a certain extent. We wonder if the same need apply to entities made out of matter. Why does not God bring it about, for example, that animals do not need to eat, so that they might refrain from eating each other, to the detriment of the operation of their formal properties?

Farrer's reply, when he asks himself this question, is as follows. To prevent physical accident God could either constantly intervene in the operation of the world, or he could pre-arrange it that such accidents could not happen. To take the example of a sapling cramped by bad soil, he could either intervene, whenever this occurs to make the soil good, or he could ensure that no seeds ever fell on soil that was not adapted

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.69-72



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to support vegetation.

However, it is part of the way certain kinds of soil are, that they frustrate the growth of plants. Their agency will be violated if they are not allowed to be that way. It is part of the value to entities that they are allowed to run themselves; they would be less valuable, less well created if each time their own agency came into conflict with that of another, that agency was frustrated, and halted, until further notice. Such entities would lack the autonomy and the independence which we reckon to be a part of their value.

God could possibly have arranged it that there were only such entities living in such harmony that no conflict would ever occur. In a well tended garden all the entities fulfil their agency without conflict. But to imagine a creation composed only of such entities is to realise that they would lack the vitality that is such an important part of the way things are. Even if that vitality could be regarded as an acceptable loss, it is by no means clear that such pre-arranged harmony is possible, even to the power of God. Physical entities, with the exception of the higher ones, cannot be imagined as taking each other's interests into account in their own operation. Such taking into account is the privilege of conscious entities. Unintelligent entities can only run themselves on very simple principles, and clashing is bound to occur<sup>1</sup>. Organic constitutions which seemed to shy away from damaging

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.55-56

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other organic constitutions, as if they knew they were there, would be only dubiously organic<sup>1</sup>.

To summarise the response to this question. We found some reason to believe that organic constitution has its own value. We found some reason to believe that the autonomy (agency) of the entities which have a organic constitution is part of their value. We found some reason to believe that any course of action God might take to prevent such organic constitutions from clashing would destroy either their agency, or their organic constitution, or both.

Granted that physical evil arises from the agency of valuable entities, we may still ask in connection with the sufferer, does physical evil go against the nature of the entity undergoing it? It seems very probable that it does not. If it is in the nature of organic entities to clash, it seems very much in the way of organic entities that they should suffer the physical consequences. And organic constitutions can only suffer physical consequences. We may find that this is more of a question in connection with animals and rational beings, where there seem to be consequences more than physical, where physical evil is seen to affect animal and rational constitutions, but we shall discuss this when we discuss these constitutions.

Meanwhile we may note that individuality is respected. Physical entities

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.51

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are allowed to pursue their own internal nature, seeking to assimilate all matter to themselves.

### 5.5 Blessings and Banes: The Animal Constitution

We turn now to Farrer's discussion of animal constitution. Farrer argues that the question about the occurrence of evil to vegetables and other non-sentient physical creatures differs from that about such occurrences to sentient creation. A vegetable can flourish, or fail to do so, but an animal perceives what is going on<sup>1</sup>. However limited in its scope, the animal lives in a world where it has some concept of the relation of other entities to itself.

The relation that it senses is, at root, always the relation of blessing or bane, and for an animal the sense of what amounts to a blessing or a bane is directly related to their perceived value either as a threat, or an aid to the flourishing and reproduction of the animal<sup>2</sup>. The pleasures and banes of a cat, for instance, characteristically take this form. The awareness of a bane, in an animal, takes the form either of pain, or of fear of pain.

We must therefore ask ourselves three questions when we are trying to see whether the nature of animal life fits in with the criteria for God's operation in the world that we outlined above. First of all we

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.77

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.77

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must ask whether it is appropriate that animals should suffer and inflict damage in the same kind of way that non-sentient objects built out of matter do. Secondly, we must ask ourselves whether, if it is appropriate that they should suffer such damage, it is also appropriate that the damage should issue in pain, and thirdly, if pain as such is appropriate, whether the pattern of suffering that does in fact exist is appropriate.

Is it in accordance with our criteria that animals should suffer damage? When we stop to think about the implications of having animals which do not suffer or inflict physical damage, Farrer points out that we should very soon find such a world to be very different from the one that we know. It would, in fact, only be possible to have such animals by placing upon them such constraints as to prevent them having a genuinely independent life. They would certainly lack the independence and vitality which we value. More importantly, it is by no means clear that God could fulfil his purpose of independent creation without making such damage at least a possibility in principle. It is by no means clear that having made such damage a possibility in principle God can prevent it in practice without destroying the animal constitutions that he has created<sup>1</sup>.

This still leaves us with a group of questions about the implications of allowing physical damage in the world. The question of the destruction

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.82

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of rational constitutions by physical means and the question of the degeneration of rational constitutions as a consequence of pain are ones that we must deal with when we consider rational constitution. The questions as to whether the infliction of physical damage is appropriate to animal constitution we have dealt with above. The questions as to whether the suffering of pain is in accordance with justice and animal constitution we shall deal with next.

Should physical damage in animals issue in pain? While it may be impossible to imagine true and independent animals that do not inflict and suffer damage, the question is not so clear when we turn to pain. Can we imagine a creation in which the absence of such damage caused pleasure, and damage was registered merely as the absence of pleasure, for example? The answer, Farrer maintains, is that we could do so in principle, as it offers no simply logical problems in the way that the previous question, about animals and physical damage, did. However, it is not possible to imagine damage without pain as a practical arrangement.

If there is the possibility of undergoing damage, then there must be a powerful and immediate device to ensure its avoidance, and this is precisely the nature of pain. An animal that tried to survive without pain, simply on a pleasure basis, would never manage a complete day. If it is the case that animals should be allowed to inflict and suffer damage, as we have suggested above that it is, then it must also be part of their constitution to be given the strongest possible motive to avoid

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such damage, and pain is the strongest possible motive. It would be absurd under these circumstances to complain that pain is painful<sup>1</sup>.

The pain arises from the damage, and the damage arises from valuable entities exercising their agency. All animals are innocently selfish, and where animal suffering does not arise from non-sentient causes it arises from this source<sup>2</sup>. The suffering of pain is in accordance with animal constitution, in that it defends animal constitution from the ills that beset it. There can be little doubt of its appropriateness as a response to damage, since it works so well<sup>3</sup>.

However there might be some question of justice. If pain is necessary to the existence of animal constitutions, there might well very well be a question whether the most appropriate thing for animal constitutions, the most loving thing which God could do for them would be to ensure their non-existence<sup>4</sup>. But in fact the world is not in general so bad a place for animal constitutions that in general non existence seems the best option. They do achieve a fairly satisfying balance between good and evil in their lives, and if they do not then they die. Farrer believes that most animals enjoy life, and flourish almost up to the point of death. They do not on the whole fear death, or suffer a great

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.87-88

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.82

3. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.88

4. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.83-84

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deal, except in this final moment<sup>1</sup>.

Death itself he does not think can be regarded as unjust to animal constitution<sup>2</sup>. There is no reason why God should have made these ongoing systems permanent, they have their value just as much in their temporariness. So neither the actual extent of suffering, nor its issue in death amounts to an injustice to animal constitution, in general.

This does not solve the whole problem about the justice of pain in animal constitutions. What Farrer may have established is that it is appropriate and just that God should use pain to protect animal constitutions. But an aspect of justice in connection with God is his respect for the individual case<sup>3</sup>.

It may be possible to accept pain in general, and to appreciate its value and necessity in principle. But there are definitely cases where pain has no apparent value for the sufferer, and where a compassionate man would be acting correctly in putting the animal out of its misery. We may wonder that God does not do this himself, either by interrupting the sensation of pain, or by bringing the existence of the animal to an end.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.80

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.83

3. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.97-98

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That is to say, while it may be in accordance with animal constitution, and justice, that animals in general should suffer as they do, there are undoubtedly animals whose suffering does not permit of the justifications on the grounds of utility outlined above. An animal that is being torn apart by another to be eaten suffers pain until it dies, and that pain has, at that stage, no conceivable utility. An animal which is sick to the point of death would be better off working itself painlessly to death, rather than preserving its energies to suffer even greater agonies. Why does God permit this? Is there any reason God should offer to individual animals in these circumstances only the effect of the average working of their in-built nervous systems, when they need something different<sup>1</sup>?

Farrer points out that God could not use the nervous system directly to accomplish this new end of defending animals from useless suffering. The only way that you can know that the suffering is useless is by knowing the outcome. A fully intelligent and expert man could not be sure of this, so it will be clear that nerves could not do it of their own accord. Nor can we imagine that it would be right for God to over-rule them in this regard. The arguments that we have outlined about the value of independence applies to nerves not less than other things. It would be absurd for God to develop a natural power such as that of pain, and systematically to over-rule it. This would not be in accordance with

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.88-89



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God's wisdom<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless we may feel that there is a lack of compassion here, that God seems to be failing to take account of the individuality of the sufferer in its suffering, that no amount of general justification of suffering will be adequate to particular cases, where we feel that the suffering has no value to the nature of the particular animal, and is in some ways unjust.

Farrer answers that in fact we do not know exactly what God does do for particular suffering animals, but we may suspect that he directs them in their suffering in the same deeply effective, but always hidden fashion that he uses to direct all things<sup>2</sup>. God is very much involved in the operation of individuals, and indeed the regularities by which man sets such store are to a certain extent only creatures of man's own perception. God is indeed regular within the structure that he has created, but that is not to suggest that his action is bounded by such regularity. He has plenty of other ways of working within his creation as well as the maintenance of the regularities<sup>3</sup>.

The other part of his answer is that God is compassionate towards the suffering individual, but he is so by being God to the sufferer. He

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.90

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.97

3. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.99-100

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provides pain to keep the animal safe. He provides the oblivion of death when pain is of no further use. He provides man, occasionally, to put them out of their misery when they need it, and sometimes brother animals to assist when they are not well. This is the form of God's compassion<sup>1</sup>.

It would be absurd to ask that God's care and compassion for his animal creatures should involve the removal of all their pain, since it is only because of the existence of pain that there are any animals to be the subject of his compassion. What he does do, however, is sufficient to satisfy the claims of his creatures upon his fatherly goodness. Anything more would either increase the dangers that they face, or it would threaten the integrity of their physical constitutions.

We can say therefore, that damage to animal constitutions may be understood as being in accordance with the criteria for the operation of God in the world in very much the same way, and for the same reasons, that damage to physical constitution as such is justified. It is the inevitable result of the independence that God has built into his creation.

The pain that comes as a consequence of this damage can be justified in the case of non-rational animals as a direct consequence of their animalness, their awareness of blessing and bane. It is an extremely

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.102-103

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effective way of enforcing the course of action most in the interest of the animal suffering the pain, under almost all circumstances. The pain that does not serve this purpose can be justified on the grounds that it does not represent the full sum of God's care for the suffering individual, and that it is the result of the operation of a system that is in accordance with the material out of which animals are made. God may seek to give form to his compassion for the individual suffering animal through what we do, and we must therefore make sure that we are willing to show compassion.

Pain is therefore the consequence of the operation of valuable agents. It happens in accordance with the constitutions of the sufferers, and in accordance with justice. In no case is the suffering there primarily for the benefit of other entities, and God gives due care to the individuality of the suffering entities in other forms of assistance, separate from the pain. The good God brings out of this suffering and fear of pain the continuance of animal creation.

### 5.6 Speaking and Loving: The Rational Constitution

We now come to Farrer's discussion of rational constitution. Farrer treats human beings as rational animals <sup>1</sup>. As such human beings participate in the constitutions we have already discussed, Material, physical and animal. In consequence of this participation in these constitutions human beings suffer what other entities with these

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.107

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constitutions suffer. But just as animal constitution had an evil not present simply in physical constitution, namely pain, so rational constitution has a variety of evils not present in other constitutions. We must seek therefore to understand what rational constitution is, before asking our questions about divine providence in connection with the evils that occur to rational constitutions in consequence of their substrates in the animal, physical material world, and the evils peculiar to rational constitution itself.

Human beings are rational animals, Farrer maintains, because they are speaking animals. The development of speech introduces a radical change in that perception of the world which we noticed in our discussion of animals. By being able to discuss other things human beings become aware of their existence in their own right, not merely as blessings and banes. They are thus able to reason about them, to give thought to how they might behave in the future, in the past, in different combinations. Human beings also become aware of the existence of other entities sharing the same nature as their own. They are thus capable of loving<sup>1</sup>.

By becoming a loving speaking being, human beings take on a whole new level of organisation which amounts to a constitution. There is no reason to believe, however, that this constitution is of itself eternal. Eternity is something which God can confer on rational constitution. It is not something which necessarily belongs to it. Precisely how God may

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.109-110

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confer eternity is not for us to know or ask <sup>1</sup>. (An eternal rational constitution is not a contradiction in the way that an eternal physical or animal constitution might be thought to be, since we credit God with such a constitution).

Rational constitution, via physical and animal constitution, is liable to a number of forms of evil. It is also connected with a number of forms of evil that are unique to itself. In order to ask our questions about the operation of providence in connection with evil, we must first try to give a fair indication of where such evils are to be identified.

Through the potential for disorganisation rational constitution is liable to death, that is to non-existence, and the fear of such non-existence. We have already given an indication of the way Farrer thinks God may be understood to work in this connection. But it is also liable to degeneration short of death, which may very well lead the individual into courses of action which would be highly immoral for one fully in control of his faculties, but which, under the circumstances, cannot be seen as the responsibility of that individual<sup>2</sup>.

While this degeneration or (where the development has not taken place in some happier time) cramping of the rational individual can indeed arise directly from his physical constitution, it can also be mediated by the

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.110

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.112

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animal constitution, through pain, or other means. Acute pain can destroy or cripple the rational faculty. Brainwashing can take this form<sup>1</sup>.

But if death, maiming, pain, and brain damage are fertile sources of evil for the rational faculty, there can be no doubt that sin is even more so. We shall have to consider our criteria in connection with God's permitting individuals to sin, and to suffer the consequences of sin.

The correct operation of the rational faculty would, in the end, bring it into communion with God. What prevents it from so doing may be divided into two categories. 1) Things which prevent the rational faculty from operating in accordance with its constitution, or operating at all. 2) The perversion of that faculty so that it does not bring itself into a state open to communion with God. The latter, we shall discover, encompasses, but is not exhausted by sin. I shall depart from Farrer's terminology, (but not, I hope, from his argument), and call these two kinds of malfunction in the rational faculty impediment and perversion.

The rational faculty, we have seen, can be impeded from operation in a number of ways. Obviously the rational faculty cannot be impeded by its own rational constitution. It is hard to imagine what it would amount to for a rational constitution immediately to prevent its own operation,

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.176

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since any such action would itself be the operation of rational constitution. The prevention of the operation of rational constitution, therefore must arise from the interruption of the operation of its substrates, physical and animal constitution.

The prevention of the operation of rational constitution by the interruption of the operation of its physical substrate, where that prevention is complete, is called death. Often impeding is only partial. Senility, and mental handicap would be cases of this kind.

Since these afflictions are merely the result of the operation or relation of the physical and animal substrates of man there need be little doubt that they are the result of valuable entities exercising their agency, and that they are in accordance with the formal properties of the human beings suffering them. There is more doubt, however about the justice of the afflictions, and very serious doubt about their compatibility with the purpose of God in making rational beings for his communion.

Farrer argues that it would be rather artificial to pretend to try and deal with this question without reference to revelation<sup>1</sup>. And the answer that we find in revelation to the problem we have outlined is that death is not to be thought of as the end of the existence of rational entities. In the case of a human being who remained satisfactorily

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.106

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rational to the point of death we may assume that God re-creates that rationality on a new substrate so that it is eternal. The case of decayed rationality is a little more difficult. Nevertheless we cannot imagine that rationality at the point of death is the criterion for potential re-creation<sup>1</sup>. If it were, then God would be prevented from re-creating those who died ~~in their~~ gradually. And if God can re-create the rationality of those who die gradually, there is no conceptual problem about his re-creating the rationality of those who have suffered brain damage.

It will be clear, however, from this account that there can, for Farrer, be no question of the "re-creation" of rational constitutions when the rational constitutions have not yet established themselves. God, he is saying, can save those who have been good and rational, when their goodness or rationality departs, through no fault of their own, because he can bring them back to a state that they had previously enjoyed, one in which they are "themselves" again, in which their personal identity remains intact.

This inability to bring about rationality where it has never occurred in the way of the formal properties of the animal constitution of a human being, that is in the case of infants and imbeciles, seems in some ways to be a frustration of God's purpose in bringing about loving and rational beings, and it may also offend our sense of justice. But this

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.111-112



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is because we tend to judge the case of such people by the wrong standards, as if there were a rational person somehow already present or implicit in every living human body.

The whole point of the argument about the hierarchy of constitutions has been that God respects their operation. Where a rational constitution is destroyed, by forces which rational constitution cannot resist, then justice may seem to require a miracle to undo the damage. Where no such rational constitution has eventuated from the operation of an animal constitution, then there is no such requirement. The rational constitution that might lay claim to such a miracle on its behalf has never existed, and there is no reason why it ever should. If that constitution has never existed then its failure as a possibility for communion with God does not represent frustration in the way that death, decay or sin might, since it is a failure on a par with the failure of all other animal constitutions to be creatures for communion with God<sup>1</sup>.

The evils we have discussed so far under the destruction of rational constitution have arisen from the operation solely of physical constitutions, in the sense that they are interruptions on the physical level of rational constitutions. A comparatively recently understood phenomenon is the interruption of the operation of rational constitution through animal constitution. Take, for example, brain washing. Here the

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.189-190 "Imbecile" is perhaps the least well chosen word in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. This appendix must perhaps be read as expressing Farrer's pain, and painful honesty, rather than his humanity.

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physical constitution of a man is left intact, his nerves are still in place, he is still alive. But by some combination of morale sapping drugs and pain the rational constitution is destroyed, but some semblance of it, its shell, so to speak is left<sup>1</sup>. Under these circumstances a man may do anything, or lose his sense of the presence God, through no fault of his own. It is quite possible that the same kind of thing may occur in illness, and may long have occurred<sup>2</sup>. The ability to achieved it scientifically and precisely in a torture chamber, however, is a new thing.

The evil, under these circumstances, Farrer maintains, is not quite what it seems. It is appalling, but it is not the involuntary twisting of a rational constitution into a state where it cannot respond to God, or discern good and evil. At the point at which the rational constitution ceases to be able to respond to God, or discern good and evil, it ceases to be a rational constitution. The important subject being tortured departs, no doubt to be recreated by God at a later stage, but no longer capable of sin or blasphemy, because no longer capable of good or faith<sup>3</sup>.

It would be heartless to spend much thought on the good that God can

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.1756

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.112

3. This understanding of subjects of torture and brainwashing leaves and awkward question as to the moral status of the victim. It might appear that, at least where the damage is permanent they cease to be human.

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bring out of these evils. Whatever the final toll of such goods may be found to be, at least one of the goods that arises from the possibility of the destruction of rational constitution, Farrer suggests, is that of increasing our sense of dependence upon God. There otherwise might be a tendency identify the picture of the Christian sufferer with that of the Stoic, complete, if not in his self-sufficiency, at least in his ability to respond to God as a rational being come what may<sup>1</sup>.

We may say, therefore, that the destruction of rational constitutions through the disruption either of the their physical or their animal substrate does not seem to run counter to our criteria for a picture of God's way with the world. It does not frustrate God's intention to create loving rational beings, since God has revealed his ability to re-create such constitutions after such interruption. It arises from the operation of the valuable entities exercising their agency, in this case the ordinary working of the physical and animal world in which the physical and animal substrates of rational constitution have their being. It does not go against justice, or the constitution of the entity undergoing it. God respects the individuality of rational constitutions by re-creating them when they are let down by their physical and animal substrates. Where it might appear that the rational constitution was suffering in a way that was not in accord with its constitution, that it had ceased to be able to operate as a rational constitution for purely physical or animal reasons, then we may assume that that rational

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.179

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constitution has ceased to exist, at least temporarily, on that suffering substrate.

There are goods that can come out of these evils, and that are dependent for their nature upon the evils concerned. Especially there is the good that we cease to take our rationality and openness to the grace of God as an indestructible feature of our living selves, but rely on God for the final securing even of this faculty.

We have been looking at the evils which befall the rational faculty from causes outside its own level of operation, that is from physical and animal causes. It will not take very much reflection however to discover that there are many evils which arise from the rational faculty directly, and which pervert that faculty.

As a rational loving creature human beings have the potential for communion with God. This communion is the fulfilment both of their rationality and of their ability to love. We have indicated above reasons why Farrer thinks we would expect there to be at least a degree of contingency to the question whether an individual man would fulfil this potential, even when given time to do so. The independence in the operation of the rational faculty might be the whole point of the existence of disorder in the lower levels of creation. And in fact we find that in a large number of cases the rational faculty is not wholly oriented to God. More importantly, we find that in a large number of cases it would not be within the natural possibilities of a particular

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rational faculty so to orient itself<sup>1</sup>.

We are looking here at a particular form of evil, called sin. Whatever perverts our rational faculty so that it does not enter into communion with God we call sin. Sin may be divided into two categories, original and actual sin. On Farrer's understanding, original sin is not sin implicit in the most fundamental nature of the rational faculty (any such fundamental nature in the rational faculty might make rational faculties a bad sort). It is sin so ingrained in a rational faculty as a result of the process of the creation of that rational faculty that it was never the subject of choice. It may be thought of as involuntary sin, in itself carrying no moral blame, which nevertheless represents a perversion of the rational faculty and prevents us from communion with God.

Since sin must be either voluntary or involuntary, (or perhaps more usually a mixture of the two), everything which does not count as original sin may be counted as actual sin, that is voluntary actions, or voluntary elements in actions, by those who could have done right, who knew what the right course of action would be, and yet did wrong.

We shall see that Farrer's account of sin suggests that original sin is the consequence of actual sin, mediated through the cultures in which children are brought up. Farrer maintains, also, that the most shocking

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.116

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aspects of the suffering of rational constitution in accordance with its constitution are in fact the consequence of the sinfulness of the sufferer.

It may very well seem strange, given the axiom that there is no such thing as a bad sort, that it seems very much as if there is such a thing as a kind of constitution that is characteristically sinful. Nothing that an animal can do, following its animal constitution, is anything other than innocent, however regrettable the consequences. But human beings may very well follow their own constitution and be doing evil.

In order to understand how it can be that a whole constitution can exist in an imperfect state, Farrer believes it is necessary to think about the individual development, the ontogenesis, so to speak, of a rational constitution.

Human beings are rational animals, Farrer argues, because they are speaking animals. They come by their rationality in the process of learning to speak. This is the approach to the development of rationality which is most in accord with all that we have been saying about God's respect for the formal properties of the entities that make up his creation. It is also in accordance with our own experience; we see the process happening in children all the time.

Because the people who surround the child in the process of the creation of its rationality have themselves been formed in the same way we may

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speaking of a rational culture, operating in human communities, which creates rational beings. It will be apparent, however, that neither the people forming children in rational culture now, nor their predecessors as far back as we care to imagine that rationality has existed in the animal world, are people wholeheartedly given to communion with God.

A selfish and spiritually ignorant parent will transmit a rational culture which is selfish and spiritually ignorant to his or her children. A child that is brought up in such a culture will tend to be selfish and spiritually ignorant. There may be elements in that culture which are not so corrupt, and in fact, because of the links Farrer discerns between language, love and justice, it is hard to imagine a rational culture properly so called, that is a culture tending to produce rational constitutions, which was rotten through and through. If the child grows to be a good person in spite of the culture, it will be by seeking to identify itself with the best in the culture.

But human beings cannot imagine that they can rework all of their rational constitution which is tainted by the culture in which they were brought up. So much is unquestioned. So much is "second nature" to everyone that we know. However heroic and scrupulous we may be it is not an option to remake ourselves from the ground up, so to speak, in a new and better fashion<sup>1</sup>.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p. 114

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Indeed it may not be possible to imagine a rational culture so completely devoid of soundness as to make the operation of love and reason within that culture impossible. However, Farrer points out that it is very easy to imagine, or even observe, a rational culture which makes communion with God not an option for a particular individual. If the rational culture of my progenitors has no conception of God at all, then I cannot make myself open to him<sup>1</sup>. If the way of life into which I have been born is one dedicated to violence and the exploitation of the weak by the strong, then it may very well not be my fault if I seek, like an obedient son, to excel in the tasks that are set before me.

This fundamental point will easily be granted; God permits there to exist cultures and families such that those brought up in these cultures and families would not be behaving in accordance with their constitutions if they spontaneously opened themselves to loving communion with God<sup>2</sup>.

Given that this is the nature of the rationality which we inherit from our culture, is it in accordance with our criteria for our picture of God's operation in the world? Farrer takes a rather round about route in his discussion of the ways in which we might address the question of whether the operation of a rational culture with these side effects can be in accordance with the operation of God's purpose in making rational

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.117

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.179-179



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loving beings for his communion. Farrer tries to indicate an answer (taken from revelation and the tradition of the Church) which, he maintains, gives the most plausible account of the operation of God's will in this connection.

He starts with an approach which is essentially that taken by the author of 4 Esdras. The fundamental image is that of the seed sown by the farmer in hope of a crop. The farmer does not count his crop a failure because not all the seeds came to fruition. If the crop is a very rare and valuable one he may not even grudge a very high degree of wastage in the seed, provided that the crop is large enough for his purposes. So it is with human beings. God desires them for his communion, and puts no artificial barriers in the way of their development into that communion. While the seed lives there is always the hope that it may produce a crop, and if it fails then God will seek for his crop elsewhere<sup>1</sup>.

On this picture decayed rational culture does not represent a frustration of God's purpose in making rational beings for his communion since it was never God's hope, however much it might in principle have been his desire, that all, or even the majority of rational constitutions would of their own free-will enter that communion. If we object to the paucity of the returns, the amount of wastage in humankind that this process represents, then we might be referred to the kind of considerations which we raised about the existence of physical

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.120-122

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constitution; that a high degree of separation from God may be necessary for the establishment of truly independent rational entities. The development of a rational culture antipathetic to the realisation of the truth of the relationship between God and man, under these circumstances, does not seem surprising. Our concern over the fate of those who, through no fault of their own never have the opportunity to respond to the word of God in their lives is, on this understanding, really a kind of moral squeamishness, an unwillingness to face up to the inevitable dangers of creating morally independent rational entities<sup>1</sup>.

At first glance this approach might seem to fulfil the main requirements of Farrer's line of argument. 4 Esdras, under Farrer's interpretation, may reasonably be read as taking one strand of Farrer's argument to its logical conclusion. If Farrer were arguing solely on the basis of the desirable independence of God's creatures, it would probably be sufficient for him to stop his argument here.

However Farrer seeks to replace this line of argument, this "dignified despair" with a better hope. 4 Esdras represents the logical conclusion of only one of his strands of argument. To put the matter at its most general, 4 Esdras fails to address Farrer's sense of the contingency of created entities, their subjection to God's contriving will. In more detail, it seems reasonable to suggest that his difficulties with the parable of Esdras are as follows.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.122

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Farrer has been suggesting that God can bring out of any evil a good that is different in kind and dependent for its nature on the evil concerned. The evil happens, at least in some way, against God's will. It must also happen without his foreknowledge of its happening, since the world that God created is a semi-chaos, not responding steadily to the will of God, rather than a regular machine unfalteringly working his purpose out. It would be wrong to imagine that it follows simply and naturally from an evil that a good can come of it. All that we know of evil suggests that it tends to breed evil rather than good. The capacity to bring good out of evil is a ceaseless triumph of God's fathomless ingenuity, rather than an aspect of creation built into its nature, in the way that  $2+2=4$ <sup>1</sup>.

If God is exercising his fathomless ingenuity on our behalf, in the details of the evils that beset us, that suggests a high degree of personal care for us. If God is caring for an individual in this way, and yet does not make a path for him such that he can respond to God, then we must accept one of two options. Either God's care for that individual does not amount to a desire for communion with him, or there can exist circumstances other than the desirable independence of the individual which can prevent God from making communion a possibility for that person. The former would certainly seem to raise questions about the justice of God, and his rational benevolence, in that such entities would share God's nature at least as much as some of those to whom he

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.115

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chose to make communion a possibility. The latter would certainly seem to raise questions about the power of God, in that it is hard to imagine something which would more clearly represent failure for God than the inability to make, for an individual he loves, even once, the possibility of a loving response<sup>1</sup>.

Farrer wishes to be able to say that God is implicated in the detail of our personality. He has not indeed made the corrupt rational culture that lies behind our sin, but he is at work in the details of it, and has, through it made us the people that we are. We shall not be at all happy with this line of thought, however, if the way a person is can blamelessly exclude him permanently from communion with God. To grant this would be to grant that God, whom we hold to be rational and benevolent, makes individual human beings in a certain way, knowing that by doing so he is excluding them from communion with him, and the possibility of the fulfilment of their nature. But God's justice, surely, is precisely the operation of rational benevolence in connection with individuality.

We looked earlier at arguments that sought to establish that it was necessary for God to make rational creatures who were capable of not knowing that there was such a thing as God, so that they could respond fully and independently to God in their own right. It is a very different thing to say that it is necessary for God to create rational

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.116

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beings that are incapable of knowing that there is such a thing as God. If entities are capable of not knowing God, or at least of not responding to him, a principle of true independence for the individual may require that they be in fact allowed not to respond to or turn to God. It is hard to see that true independence is really served by making them actually incapable of responding to God.

So it does not seem acceptable by the criteria with which we are operating that God should accept, without further ado, the unfortunate effects of rational culture in preventing the response of individuals to himself, whether through guiltless ignorance, or through guiltless sin. There is no doubt, however, that God does allow these effects of rational culture to operate in this way in this life. Any hypothesis that seeks to unravel this riddle must refer to some future state.

We cannot allow ourselves to imagine, Farrer argues, that in this future state God can simply undo the evil that has been wrought in rational constitutions by the blowing of a trumpet, or the operation of his sovereign will. This would go against all that has been said about the respect of God for the formal properties of the entities with which he works. If God is to turn sinful selfish rational constitutions into redeemed and loving ones, then He must do so in accordance with their constitutions, in the next world no less than this<sup>1</sup>.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.119

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Quite apart from the arguments already adduced to the respect of the formal properties of entities, it is by no means clear that there is another way of changing a rational constitution, while retaining the identity of the constitution through the change. If God were to take a thoroughly bad rational constitution, corrupt since a corrupting infancy, and wave away the bad in it, replacing it with something else, keeping only the good, then you would not have a redeemed version of the original rational constitution, but something completely new which has some rather anomalous links with a rational constitution now destroyed<sup>1</sup>.

Farrer also points out that such a picture of the operation of redemption after death would evacuate the Christian teaching about the necessity for leading a moral life in this world. If God can simply remake us good whatever happens then there is no need for moral struggle in this world. Indeed one might suspect that there is no need for this world. If God can make, by the operation of his sovereign will out of materials as unprepossessing as a corrupt rational constitution, a loving independent rational being (a point which we are by no means willing to grant), then there seems no reason why he should bother with a world. To make by sovereign will is surely no more difficult or paradoxical than to remake by sovereign will, when we are talking about independent and loving rational entities. If God can do the latter, surely he would chose to do the former<sup>2</sup>.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.118-120

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.117-118

## THE GOD OF SNAILS AND SONG THRUSHES

So we cannot believe that God accepts these unfortunate and unjust consequences of the operation of corrupt rational culture in this world. We must assume that any action God takes in this connection is in some future state of the individual, since it patently does not occur, or does not always occur on earth. We must assume that when it does occur it will be in accordance with the formal properties of the rational constitutions concerned.

The speculation Farrer proposes for the understanding of the operation of divine providence in this connection is as follows: The means God has chosen for the conversion of corrupt rational constitutions in this world are Christ and the Church. By this means the individual rational constitution is confronted with all that is needed to effect this conversion, in accordance with the formal properties of that constitution. There is no reason why that should not also be the means of the conversion of rational constitutions after their death. At some point after death the individual will be confronted with the glory of Christ, and will either choose to submit to that glory, or to reject it. Since it will be a revelation of that glory undistorted by the operation of rational culture, no such constitution will fail to make the correct response except by its own fault.

We must not imagine, however, that the revelation of the Glory of Christ is to be thought of in terms of physical magnificence. It is through the operation of the Church in showing the glory of Christ that rational constitutions are redeemed in this world. Jesus himself revealed the

## THE GOD OF SNAILS AND SONG THRUSHES

glory of God by his righteousness and goodness, primarily, rather than by vast physical demonstrations. We may assume that the same applies after death. The revelation of Christ which the individual rational constitution will be offered will be a revelation of the righteousness that Christ has wrought in his Church. What the rational constitution will see is the community of the redeemed, which is the glory of Christ, which he is being invited to join.

If this is the case, then God brings all rational constitutions into communion with himself except where they separate themselves from him by their own informed, enlightened, perverse choice. He does so by revelation and invitation, which is in accordance with their own formal properties as (potentially) loving rational entities. The blindness which he permits them to suffer in this world, in accordance with their formal properties, is offset by the justice of his dealings at a later stage, when that blindness is lifted for the moment of choice. Out of the evil of original sin God brings the good of truly independent voluntary love and communion with himself<sup>1</sup>.

If original sin is a consequence of actual sin in the way that we indicated above, that is if rational culture is constantly recorruped by the selfish decisions of those who pass it on, then we ought to ask whether the operation of actual sin is in accordance with our understanding of the working of God in the world. The point will not in

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.124-130



## THE GOD OF SNAILS AND SONG THRUSHES

fact need much further argument. A little thought will establish beyond doubt the point that actual sin is the perfect case of the operation of valuable entities as agents. In fact our concern about it is probably not primarily the difficulty of understanding how God can permit it, but the difficulty of understanding why human beings do it. This is a very real and difficult question, the perversity of human choice, but on this understanding it is not a question of theodicy.

It is our Christian hope that this sin does not permanently frustrate God's intention for ourselves. It is our Christian experience that suitable good may spring out of the evil. There is nothing that we suffer as the consequence of sin that is not a consequence of our own natures.

Perhaps we should briefly try to make clear what, in our reconstruction of Farrer's argument, we have, and have not yet, tried to establish. We are trying to understand the evils of rational constitution that are peculiar to rational constitution and not simply consequences of the substrates of rational constitution in animal and physical constitution. Although these are not all either sin or the consequences of sin, we have asserted that all are coloured by sin. We have therefore sought to establish that the operation of rational culture in creation is such as to corrupt, or hold in ignorance of God, a significant proportion of rational constitutions. We have tried to demonstrate that the operation of rational culture in this way is in accordance with the criteria which we are using for determining the operation of God's providence in the

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world, being neither a frustration of his purpose, nor a violation of the formal properties of rational constitutions, and arising from the operation of the agency of valuable entities, in this case our cultural forebears.

What remains to be done is to establish that the suffering undergone by rational constitutions, where the suffering arises from physical accident, animal pain, or rational grief, with or without the mediation of sin, are in accordance with justice. Do they show an adequate respect to the individuals in God's creation? The point is that we cannot accept that a given structure of creation expresses the workings of a just God simply because the final outcome of the operation of its constituents is good. A suitable weight must be given to each of the constituents. It is not compatible with the justice of God for any entity to suffer solely and involuntarily for the benefit of another. Bereavement, despair, the agony of illness are quite clearly in accordance with the constitution of the entities causing and undergoing them. But are they in accordance with justice?

The answer to this question is to be sought in the different places depending on whether the question in hand is suffering, however acute, or death. We cannot justly endure suffering solely and involuntarily for the benefit of others. It may be that God will bring very real edification for me out of the suffering of my friend. The sufferings of the starving may have opened many hearts among the wealthy and many are spiritually richer as a consequence. But it is not an option to us to

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attempt to vindicate the ways of providence in the world on the basis of such "knock on" effects. They are indeed goods. They may be very real, and of the utmost importance. But they are not enough themselves to show that God is respecting the individuality of those who suffer. For that to be so we must be able to believe that God is caring for those who suffer in a way that is appropriate to them.

It is easier to believe that there is an appropriate good for the individual who suffers also, if one perceives in the operation of suffering borne a positive good, which amounts to a kind of work. One who suffers prayerfully, and without rancour is doing God's will, saving his soul and engaged in powerful intercession. Suffering is much easier to bear on this understanding, and the universal availability of this transformation of suffering represents a very considerable factor in the justice of God's permitting suffering. There are rational constitutions of whom we may say that it were better for them that they had never been born. But in so far as the keenest aspects of their suffering arise from their actual sin, or the failure to make use of available grace, their existence and therefore their suffering does not amount to an injustice<sup>1</sup>.

The scales, however remain radically unbalanced without the hope of the resurrection. Prayerful suffering is hardly a fair deal for those who suffer if there is no point at which a suffering life can be completed

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p. 173

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in the communion with God. It is in the end this point, that those who suffer in their physical, animal or rational constitution may be brought through that suffering to redemption, that makes it possible to speak seriously of God's justice in suffering<sup>1</sup>.

It will be clear in this connection that God's justice, in the sense of his respect for the individual suffering is very close to his ability to bring appropriate good out of evil. The rational constitutions that suffer have the option open to them of redeeming that suffering by the way that they undergo it. This is an option which God makes available to each, whether they perceive it or not. God's respect for the individuality of the sufferer is the same as his respect for the individuality of the sinner. It is an offer of redemption.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* p.169

## **FORSYTH AND FARRER; JERUSALEM AND ATHENS?**

### FORSYTH AND FARRER; JERUSALEM AND ATHENS?

What do the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer have in common,  
and what is the relationship between their arguments  
and other traditions of discussion of God and Evil?

#### **6.1 Strange Bedfellows?**

At first glance, it would be hard to imagine two more different approaches to Theology and theodicy than Forsyth and Farrer. Where Farrer is urbane, rational, fluent, almost unacceptably so given his subject matter, Forsyth is passionate, anti-philosophical, tortuous, repetitive and often obscure.

I have argued that there is more to Farrer's approach to God and Evil than the limpid simplicity that meets the eye, and indeed that Forsyth's diffuse presentation conceals a much tighter and simpler logical and metaphysical structure than might at first appear. The impression must remain, however, that these two arguments are sufficiently divergent to discourage any synoptical or synthetic treatment. Anyone who argued, for example, that a combination of ideas from Swinburne and Barth on a given subject might be illuminating, would face an uphill struggle, because

## FORSYTH AND FARRER; JERUSALEM AND ATHENS?

the patterns of thought involved are so widely different. Each has what one might call a different canon of assumption and successful argument.

The reconstructions of the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer that I have offered, will not, in themselves, do very much to lessen this impression of irreconcilable difference, the sense that Forsyth and Farrer, whatever their individual merits in the discussion of God and Evil, effectively pass as ships in the night, unaware of each other's arguments and agendas. Since I shall argue that a creative synthesis is possible and desirable, it is necessary establish its *prima facie* plausibility. For I think it can be shown that at the very root of Forsyth and Farrer's ideas about God and evil there is a telling similarity of belief and approach.

To demonstrate what I take to be a community of interest and approach between Forsyth and Farrer, I shall concentrate, in the first instance, on three areas where there seem to be interesting similarities. These similarities in fact arise from the deepest level of thought in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, and *The Justification of God* where Forsyth and Farrer are agreed on a particular understanding of the nature of the problem evil poses for Christian believing.

Once this similarity in the fundamental response of Forsyth and Farrer to evil is grasped, it becomes easier to understand why these two arguments can seem <sup>to</sup> evade classification either as philosophical or theological approaches to the discussion of God and evil.

## **FORSYTH AND FARRER; JERUSALEM AND ATHENS?**

For all their apparent differences in style and content, the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer have three striking qualities in common. These qualities have an important family resemblance to each other, and that they ultimately depend upon a fourth similarity, a particular understanding of the nature of faith, that lies at the heart of what Forsyth and Farrer have to say about God and Evil.

### **6.2 Faith in Lay Faith**

The first striking similarity is that they are committed to the normative status of the beliefs of ordinary Christians, of "lay Christianity". That is to say, while acknowledging that there are inadequate and deviant forms of Christianity, they are determined to work with what ordinary believers ordinarily believe and with their experience of God<sup>1</sup>. They are chary about theological discussion that is not clearly attuned to the faith of the faithful. Faith must be theological, but Theology cannot take priority over the actual nature of faith.

In his concern for the centrality of the lay Christianity, Forsyth feels his is fighting on two fronts. He maintains that the Catholic and Anglican Churches have a conception of faith which gives far too much weight to propositions, handed down authoritatively by the church, which the individual believer has to accept, on authority, and relate to his

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1. Cf. Richard Harries introductory essay in *Divine Action*.

## FORSYTH AND FARRER; JERUSALEM AND ATHENS?

experience as best he may. The Free Churches, on the other hand, have allowed their perception of the importance of the experience of redemption to dwindle. Rather than grasping this experience, and exploring its theological interior, and its moral implications, there has been a tendency to consider all the other concerns of the faithful. *Churches are frayed into ribbons of small but kindly endeavour. ... And there issues from them no moral Word piercing and commanding enough to reach the public soul at the depths to which it is stirred by a catastrophe of the first rank*<sup>1</sup>.

What is important, therefore, is not that Christian Theology should simplify itself to accommodate itself to "simple, easy and domestic religion"<sup>2</sup>, but that it should continue to take as its raw material, and its fundamental point of reference, the given, the evangelical experience of redemption, which is the core, and the cause, if they are enabled to see it, of the faith of believers. Indeed, there is every danger that unless Theology explains faith to itself in this way, Lay Christianity will change its meaning. Instead of being lay in the sense of having its roots in the work God does in the consciences of his people, it will become lay in the sense of being concerned only with what is apparent, and easy, and obviously good.

In *The Justification of God* Forsyth is arguing that faith which is

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.85.

2. *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, p.17.



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enabled by Theology to keep a hold on its own nature, is not likely to become unhinged by the catastrophe of war. He is arguing that by referring believers back to the very root of their faith, in their experience of judgment and salvation at the Cross, Theology can enable believers to see the war, and all such evils, not as scandals to faith, but as reinforcements to faith. The materials for understanding the war lie within themselves, within the experience of redemption.

Forsyth is arguing that the lay experience of redemption provides the interpretative key for the understanding of the War, and that this experience is fundamentally in tune with the reality that his readers were trying to come to terms with.

Something similar might be said for the experience of contingency. I have argued that this is the central category of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. The contingency with which Farrer's argument opens has a very strong resemblance to the causal indeterminacy that lies at the heart of Farrer's description of the world in terms of overlapping levels of constitution. Where Forsyth is seeking to apply a central lay intuition to the specific circumstances of the War, Farrer is indicating the how the experience of contingency can be made the interpretative key for an understanding of creation.

*The root of all Theology is real religion*<sup>1</sup>, are the opening words of *The*

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1. *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*, p.3.

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*Person and Place of Jesus Christ*. They could almost be the first words of *Faith and Speculation*, although in this case the words might better run, *The root of all philosophical Theology is real religion*. As Farrer puts it, *The philosophical enquiry into the grounds for belief in God is neither an examination of the reasons which lead the believer into commitment, nor is it an independent investigation unrelated to those reason. It is an examination of an assumption which, in accepting those reasons, the believer makes*<sup>1</sup>.

This insistence on the normative quality of lay Christianity has important implications for the role of theological and philosophical reflection in the Christian response to evil. Forsyth and Farrer both recognise that Christians are not just thinkers about God. They are experiencers of God, and doers who, at the very least, work in the light of his presence. By virtue of being books, containing conceptions, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* and *The Justification of God* obviously relate most directly to Christians in their capacity as thinkers. Nonetheless, for both Farrer and Forsyth, experience of God and action relating to that experience form an essential part of the resolution of the problems that evil poses to faith.

This is a point open to misconstruction. Of course, in the background of any Christian discussion of evil there should be the awareness that Christians have other things to do in relation to evil than just discuss

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1. *Faith and Speculation*, p.12.

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it. It is not on this important, but unilluminating consideration that I want to suggest a significant convergence in the thought of Forsyth and Farrer.

Farrer and Forsyth have compelling approaches to the question of what it is possible and necessary for us to know about the relationship between God and evil. Forsyth is dismissive of Theology that does not emanate from the experience of redemption, because such Theology lacks the capacity <sup>to</sup> grasp and change events and people. This is the basis of much of his criticism of contemporary religion. Farrer concludes with a passage that indicates the centrality of action as a way of coming to understand *the grain of existence, and the movement of the purposes of God*<sup>1</sup>. I have argued above that the whole purpose of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is to keep the believer in that active relationship to God's will that makes it possible to continue to experience God at work in His world.

In both cases, these compelling approaches depend upon particular understandings of the connection between belief in God, experience of God, and action in relation to God. For this reason it should be clear that the concern with experience and action in this context cannot be considered as an apologetic and pastoral sideshow to the main theological discussion.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.188.

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### 6.3 The Ambiguity of Evil

The second striking point of similarity within these arguments, that I wish to highlight, is in Forsyth and Farrer's conception of the ambiguity of evil. It is perhaps to state a very obvious point, but, there is for Christians an ambiguity about evil. Evil is detested by God, but it exists in his created order. An atheist may see evil as detestable and as pointing directly away from the possibility that there is a good, powerful God. A Christian understanding of God and evil is bound to be more complex.

We may perhaps follow Hick in his suggestion that these more complex ways of understanding the relationship of God and evil can be broken down into two fundamental sorts, the Augustinian and the Irenaean. The Augustinian Christian, Hick argues, sees evil as the detestable but unavoidable consequences of human freedom, issuing in sin. The Irenaean Christian, by contrast sees evil more in terms of its value in the development of mature souls<sup>1</sup>.

For both the Augustinian and the Irenaean Christian, there is an ambiguity about evil. We should notice however that it is a slightly different ambiguity in each case. For the Augustinian, evil is an unfortunate and unavoidable by-product of an incomparable good, human freedom. For the Irenaean, evil is an unavoidable requirement for the

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1. *Evil and the God of Love* Hick, Macmilan, London 1966.

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production of an incomparable good, human maturity.

There is a basic robustness about Hick's categorisation. Christians can, and do, by means of the "Augustinian" and the "Irenaeian" understandings of God and evil, integrate their experiences of God and evil. There are honourable traditions, in the Bible and the Church, of faithful reaction to evil both as specific and appropriate to human nature, to be borne with patient and loving submission, and as challenge, to be learnt from and overcome to the Glory of God.

Perhaps because I have not been sufficiently schooled in these traditions, however, they seem to me to set the experience of evil at one remove from the experience of God. They do not seem to make it possible for the experience of evil to be a satisfactory prime element in the intuition of God. I would, at least, be inclined to be uncomfortable with one who came to believe in God primarily because he sensed that he lived in a creation where human nature and human wrongdoing brought inevitable and just punishment, whether on humanity or the individual. Similarly, I would be concerned to meet a Christian whose primary intuition of God was of One who strengthened him by permitting suffering.

Effectively, both the "Augustinian" and the "Irenaeian" understandings of the relationship of God and evil seek to indicate that evil is not an impediment to belief in God, and they work more or less well, on this level. I believe that it can be shown, however, that the arguments of

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Forsyth and Farrer go a crucial step further, and indicate why the experience of evil is, at least in some cases, conducive to faith.

There is no doubt that much of what Forsyth has to say about God and evil is "Augustinian" in character, and that he is concerned to show the War as the just and inevitable consequence of human abuses. Similarly, there is no doubt that Farrer is "Irenaean" on Hick's characterisation<sup>1</sup>. The freedom of human natures to do wrong is at the heart of their value. What is distinctive about them, however is the way that for both of them evil stands absolutely at the heart of their central intuitions of God

The Evangelical Experience of the redemption of the conscience, linked with the Cross of Christ, Forsyth is arguing, arose from crisis rather than order, and is by its nature a perception of our unworthiness. Correctly understood, this places the experience evil in a different relation to faith from that assumed in many discussion of God and evil. *Our faith did not arise from the order of the world; the world's convulsion, therefore, need not destroy it. Rather it rose from the sharpest crisis, the greatest war, the deadliest death and the deepest*

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1. *Evil and the God of Love* (1966) contains references to Forsyth and Farrer that are not present in the second edition. Hick has a brief discussion of Farrer (pgs 273-276) in which he concludes that Farrer's theodicy is Augustinian with Irenaean leanings. Specifically he considers the Parable of the Garden as (an Augustinian) presentation of the principle of plenitude, and Farrer's discussion of the need for a "Physical Veil" between God and his free creatures as Irenaean in its implications. Hick feels that Farrer's dismissal of these two parables of creation is precipitate. Hick refers to Forsyth (Pgs 246-250) primarily for his dismissal of teleological styles of theodicy.

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*grave the world ever knew - in Christ's Cross*<sup>1</sup>.

Referring to the War, Forsyth writes; *Most of the drifts and all the dominants, in modern civilisation were inviting it. Indeed if it is hard to believe in a theodicy with things as they are, it would be harder still to trust Christian righteousness if disaster did not follow from things as they have been. The present situation a monument to the failure of the Church! Why it is the necessary reaction on an egoist civilisation of the God of the Church's Gospel. The war is a revelation of man's evil on the one hand and God's righteousness on the other*<sup>2</sup>.

If the evangelical experience of redemption also has at its core the "revelation of man's evil on the one hand and God's righteousness on the other", then it should be clear that the experience of war, or indeed of any degree of human sinfulness, is apocalyptic, revelatory. Human evil points to God, is indeed, on Forsyth's view, a fundamental term in our experience of God.

Farrer takes up a similar, parallel line of argument *We must concede as a point of mere theory, that the imperfection of things need not go to such a length as we see it do, for there to be a difference between creation and its creator. A harmonious society of archangels would already fall an infinite distance below the perfection of God, and the*

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1. *The Justification of God*, p.54.

2. *The Justification of God*, p.132.

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*mind of an archangel would be quick to acknowledge the interval. But we are not archangels. Our minds are scaled to the world of which we form a part, and require the violent sort of evidence which it supplies. The more outrageous the mixture, the more preposterous the tragicomedy of good and evil, the more striking for us the evidence of deity. Is not this universe of ours, of all possible worlds, the most plainly dependent on a higher goodness<sup>1</sup>.*

I have argued in previous chapters that this understanding of contingency informs Farrer's thinking from top to bottom. The same basic theme runs through the relationship of God to the world as a whole, and the relationship of the individual levels of nature that make it up. It follows that, while on one level every incident of the unfortunate consequences of contingency represents a problem for faith, and is a challenge to theodicy, every such incident is also an example of precisely the quality in created natures that points most clearly to God.

It is possible to see a connection between this similarity in the understanding of the nature of the ambiguity of the experience of evil for Christians, and the point we were making in the previous section about the significance, for both authors, of lay Christianity. Perhaps because of the attention that they pay to the beliefs of ordinary believers, Forsyth and Farrer seek to provide ways of understanding the

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, p.9-10.



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relationship between God and evil that do justice to the ambiguity of evil in Christian believing, the way in which the experience of evil at once points to God and leads to doubt. The evangelical experience of redemption and the experience of contingency both speak to a pastoral context where evil is at once an affirmation of and a problem to faith.

With the a view to a synthesis of the arguments of Farrer and Forsyth, it is important that we should register that they both, in different ways, recognise the ambiguity of evil without making extravagant use of any conception of the educational or teleological value of evil and suffering. No one can deny that occasionally such value is to be discerned. But to make much of it, and seek to account for evil and suffering in terms of its value is unsatisfactory and heartless. One may seek to show that evil and suffering are inevitable, incomprehensible, remediable or redeemable without denying their fundamental nature. Expend too much effort on showing that they are valuable, and you run the risk of forgetting that they are in fact evil.

In the conceptions of Farrer and Forsyth evil has an ambiguity in connection with our belief and trust in God, but it is not, for either of them, an ambiguity of value. We must not forget, however, that the evil from which their fundamental intuitions of God arise is different in each case, or at least that there is a different balance. Contingency is at its most apparent in suffering. Redemption and the need for redemption relate most closely to Sin.

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This point about a similarity of valuation of evil is extremely important, and should help us to overcome some of the concerns that might arise from seeking a synthesis between theological positions that are based upon different intuitions. Because there is no fundamental difference between Farrer and Forsyth's valuation of evil, because neither of them is an exponent of arguments of the form "evil is good for you" one of the tensions that is apparent between different kinds of discussion of God and evil is removed. That is to say, the evil conquered by Christ in Forsyth's discussion is congruent with an evil in Farrer's discussion that is genuinely to be detested, and not just learnt from or valued for its humanising properties.

### **6.4 The Believer's Perspective**

The third striking area of convergence that we need to consider, relates to Forsyth and Farrer's commitment to the perspective of the believing subject. A proper understanding of the relationship of God and evil is available to believers, they argue, as a consequence of their belief, and from the perspective of their belief. It cannot be sought from a quasi-objective standpoint. It is this commitment that marks out most clearly, perhaps, Forsyth and Farrer as distinctive voices in the discussion of God and Evil.

We have seen how Forsyth and Farrer analyse a particular ambiguity in the way Christians experience evil. Evil drives us into a dependence upon God that is the basis of our faith, and a cooperation with Him that

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is the basis of our life of faith. It also discourages and mystifies us. If Forsyth and Farrer can help us understand this apparent contradiction, they are, at the very least, helping us to a practical understanding of the role of evil in our faith. From the point of view of academic Theology, however, their discussion is unnerving. It seems to work with different rules, and even aim for a different objective.

The reason for this unnerving difference may also, perhaps, be sought, in their distinctive commitment to lay Christianity. Forsyth and Farrer start with intuitions which are, in more specific and less philosophical terms, fundamental to ordinary Christian faith. They are common property, lay property, in no sense the specific domain of theologians, or experts. These intuitions raise questions that can, and must, be discussed in the most rigorous possible way. But Forsyth and Farrer believe that the deepest answers to these questions are embedded, active, but not articulated, in the lives of those who seek to live by these intuitions.

It is these active, embedded answers that Forsyth and Farrer are seeking to articulate. Farrer's style lays him open to the charge that he is a amateur in Theology <sup>1</sup>. Forsyth might superficially be dismissed as a mere preacher. Neither charge is fair. They systematically seek understandings of evil in terms of lay, personal, ambivalent experience. It is inevitable and right that their style and objectives should

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1. See Charles Conti's note (2) P. 85 *For God and Clarity*, ed. J.C Eaton and A Loades, Pickwick Publications, Pennsylvania 1983

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reflect this concentration.

In emphasising Forsyth and Farrer's commitment to the perspective of the believing subject, I am seeking to define their approaches to the discussion of God and evil against that particularly of the practice of theodicy in the philosophy of religion.

We need, of course, to understand the roots of such theodicy in the enlightenment. The very word owes its currency to Leibniz's *Theodicée*. Leibniz was writing at a time when memories of the thirty years war made appeals to revelation unattractive. Natural Theology held sway, and questions about God and evil were addressed by attempting to bring together *a priori* considerations of what it would be reasonable for God to create, and a *posteriori* analysis and speculation upon the phenomenal world<sup>1</sup>.

It would be fair to reckon that much modern discussion of theodicy is attempting to do the same thing. It is attempting to marry up the reasonable demands we might make of God before worshipping him, with a reasonable interpretation of the world. Viewed unsympathetically, bringing the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* together can seem like trying to close curtains that are (possibly) too small for the windows they cover.

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1. Loades, Ann, *Kant and Job's Comforters* in *New Studies in Theology* 1, (London: Duckworth, 1980), p.119.

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To state this less fancifully, this kind of discussion of theodicy often holds that the stretching of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori* towards each other is an intellectual problem that must be solved prior to belief. For this reason it makes little reference to revelation, or to specifically religious experience. To do so would be to beg their question. Only when the theodacist has satisfied himself with these external, objective, and unrefuted arguments can he proceed to enter into the life of faith.

In this tradition of philosophical discussion, which treats evil as a problem which must in some sense be "dealt with" before it is rationally possible to believe in the existence of God, God is classically delineated as omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent. The opening of Plantinga's essay, *The Free Will Defence* is very typical of this kind of thought, and makes very clear to anyone who has read anything in this area, what kind of discussion is to ensue.

*Since the days of Epicurus many philosophers have suggested that the existence of evil constitutes a problem for those who accept theistic belief. Those contemporaries who follow Epicurus here claim, for the most part, to detect logical inconsistency in such belief. So McCloskey:*

*Evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil, on the one hand<sup>1</sup>, and the belief in the omnipotence and*

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*perfection of God on the other*<sup>1</sup>.

Similarly, Swinburne writes:

*The problem of evil is of course the problem of how if God, by definition omniscient, omnipotent and perfectly good, made the world, there is evil in it. It has often been claimed that the existence of evil provides conclusive disproof of the existence of God*<sup>2</sup>.

This is not the point at which Forsyth and Farrer seek to open the discussion of God and evil. They are unwilling to abandon the perspective of the believing subject, because they hold that it is only from this perspective that God and his creation are comprehensible. Their requirement is for an account of evil that addresses human beings already trying to make sense of their redeemed fallenness, or their contingency. They wish to convince. They treat evil as integral to belief. They aim to explain faith to itself, to show what relationship it actually stands in to evil.

Forsyth and Farrer are unwilling, in the discussion of God and evil, to abandon the perspective of the believing subject. Because of the interrelatedness of thought, action and experience in Farrer and Forsyth's understanding of Christian believing, they are not ultimately

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1. Mitchell, B. *The philosophy of Religion*, (Oxford, OUP 1971) p 105

2. *The Existence of God*, (Oxford, OUP 1979), P.200.

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seeking the kind of objective, public, transitive knowledge or opinion that some kinds of discussion of God and evil might seem to promise.

This may seem intellectually scandalous, but it does have its own clear internal rational foundation. Suppose you base your faith on an intuition that has affected your entire understanding and perception of reality, and indeed your whole epistemological foundation, and you take this to be an intuition of the deepest and most illuminating reality. It cannot make sense to seek an archimedean point outside this intuition from which to judge it and justify it.

Forsyth is very clear on this point, which lies at the root of his objections to philosophical theodicy<sup>1</sup>. Forsyth asserts that the kind of philosophy that delights in theodicy is fundamentally foreign to the experience of sin that set us on the path to a proper understanding of God. *God's justification of us his also his Self-justification*. That is to say that the crucial factor in understanding the relationship between God and evil is not coming to an appropriate external rational justification, but grasping the implication of the experience of one's own justification.

It is much easier to believe that Farrer is appealing to reason for a justification of God. It is also very clear that large sections of Farrer's argument could be inserted into a reasonably formal argument of

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1. *The Justification of God* P. 143

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the variety that I have outlined above, that seeks to make the a *posteriori* experience of this world as we happen to find it, match up with the a *priori* picture of God as we chose to delineate him. The clues that this is not what he is really attempting are to be found in his appeal to revelation, and, as I have mentioned already, his early appeal to the argument from contingency.

I have suggested that Farrer's fundamental project in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is that of seeking ways of thinking about God's relationship with the world that keep us in that crucial friendship with God's will that is essential for a continued understanding of his way with the World. How does this differ from the project of seeking a rational external justification of God? The difference is that Farrer is able to appeal to the contents of that relationship. He can appeal, as we have seen, to the experience of contingency as a revelation of God. He can also appeal directly to revelation. *No Christian opinion can hesitate to hold that God's purpose in permitting (human ill's), and his kindness in curing them, are equally explained in the revelation he has given us. And it seems either absurd, or disingenuous in a Christian writer to discuss the Theology of man's misfortunes from any other starting point*<sup>1</sup>.

Both Farrer and Forsyth have a conception of the believer's knowledge of God that is essentially a knowledge-in-relationship. Evil is a problem

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* P.106



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for them in very different ways, but it is in both cases a problem because it makes it difficult for believers to trust, understand, and act upon the relationship in which they hold themselves to stand to God.

### **6.5 Begging the Question, or Choosing the Right One**

At first glance the three similarities I have just outlined may seem a bit of a rag-bag, and not an encouraging foundation for the evocation of a systematic similarity between two divergent arguments. Indeed, a hostile reconstruction of these three similarities might tend to suggest that Forsyth and Farrer are united by a particular and serious failing; a tendency to beg the question. We might wonder whether the emphasis on lay Christianity, the particular grasp of the ambiguity of evil and the commitment to the perspective of the believing subject are in fact joint failings, rather than a valuable common perspective.

To a hostile reconstruction, the permissibility of "Lay Christianity", for example, would seem to be the question that theodicy is attempting to answer. Evil can only be accepted as pointing (even ambiguously) to God if the existence of God is compatible with the existence of evil, again the very question that theodicy is classically attempting to answer. The right to continue to appeal to the evangelical experience of redemption, in spite of the Great War, it might be argued, is only to be granted after the completion of a more or less successful theodicy.

Similarly, the appeal Farrer wishes to make to the absolute, non-

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contingent term of the contingency argument, we might argue, depends upon a demonstration that this absolute term is coherent, i.e. that God is just. Can it be a virtue to refuse to abandon the perspective of the believing subject, and to embrace an ambiguity in the experience of evil, when the question in hand is precisely whether evil makes that perspective incoherent?

It would be possible to press this point too hard. There is certainly insufficient evidence to charge Farrer with fideism, and probably insufficient evidence to convict Forsyth on such a charge. That is to say, although both Forsyth and Farrer regard certain experiences as containing the hermeneutical key to the understanding of all experience, including the experience of evil, it is a key that can only be turned, so to speak, by means of reason. The burden of my reconstruction of their arguments is that Forsyth and Farrer are saying neither: a) *If evil entails a conflict between faith and reason, it is right and proper to prefer faith to reason.* Nor: b) *In the face of evil reason must be satisfied before there can be faith.* But: c) *In the face of evil, reason must interrogate faith, and will find that faith provides a coherent and integrated understanding of the relationship between God and evil.*

One way to refute the charge that one is begging the question is to demonstrate that one does have a question in hand, that it is of interest and genuine importance, even if it is not the one that your opponent believes to be the really interesting one. How may we define Forsyth's and Farrer's basic questions against those characteristic of

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the theological and philosophical approaches to evil?

The first problem, of course, is to come up with some satisfactory generalisations about Theology and philosophy, and one only has to state the problem to make the artificiality of any putative "solution" plain. It cannot be possible to come up with a generally agreed characterisation of the theological question about God and evil, or the philosophical question. Writings on the subject are so extensive and various.

I shall, however, risk one generalisation, if only by way of indicating what I am, for these purposes, treating as Theology and what I am thinking of as philosophy. Characteristically Theology finds in evil material for providing content for its understanding of the nature of God, where philosophy sees in evil the limitation of what it is permissible to say about God.

Within Theology, of course, there is an almost limitlessly extensive discussion of evil. The fact of evil impinges upon all the classic doctrines of Christianity. One cannot consider, for example, creation, incarnation, atonement, or providence, without facing the problem of giving an account of evil, which is true to the fundamental nature of evil, and also indicates the specific relationship of God and evil in the context of that doctrine. If one could draw together all the different discussions of evil in a particular systematic Theology one would expect to be in a position to reconstruct the main contours of

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that Theology.

This can of course only be a rough characterisation. Theology that in its discussion of evil failed to present an understanding of God that was attuned to the experience of the world of its readers, that failed, in effect, the judgment of experience, would fail as Theology.

We are on firmer ground, perhaps, if we reckon that some writings about God and evil in the Philosophy of Religion are concerned more to establish the limits of what it is permissible to say about God, in the light of evil, than to illuminate in any very positive way the understanding of God's way with evil in the world.

If these generalisations are permissible in any way, then we might use them to discern the characteristic theological and the characteristic philosophical questions about God and evil. Characteristic theological questions about God and evil would be: *How does God deal with evil? What can we learn about God from evil, and from what we discern to be God's way with evil?* Characteristic philosophical questions would be: *What limitations does our experience of evil, and the presence of evil in the world, place upon our notion of, or belief in, God.*

It is not immediately obvious how these two varieties of discussion impinge upon one another. Hick represents one possible approach to the relationship. It is by a somewhat partial amalgamation that Hick himself seeks to answer what he takes to be the fundamental questions about God

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and evil. It is clear from Hick's willingness to invoke the concept of the "Good Eschaton" that he is willing to take his discussion of God and evil beyond the realms of "natural Theology". He has also a useful discussion of strands in biblical discussion of evil <sup>1</sup>, but it would be going too far to reckon *Evil and the God of Love* as a theological discussion of evil.

Faced with questions about God and evil Philosophy and Theology seem to invite different, possibly irreconcilable, intellectual strategies. In the philosophical approach to the problem of evil, where evil is a problem to Theology, the intention is to clear a (usually rather limited) way for Theology. Until you have demonstrated that the entity of which Theology speaks is logically compatible with the existence of evil, so the argument runs, it is futile to consider what the further implications of its existence might be. The natural strategy is to minimise the quantity and negative significance of evil.

It is, however, questionable whether the evil of this philosophical discussion of God and evil, can easily be identified with the evil within systematic Theology, which by its very unruliness, force and power, gives substance to the concepts of incarnation and atonement. The philosophical approach to God and evil may clear a way for something, but it is possible to doubt that it clears a way for systematic Theology. Hick asks "...if man's anguish can be used to a constructive

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1. *Evil and the God of Love*. P. 352-357

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end, how can it be truly *evil* and truly contrary to God's will for us<sup>1</sup>. This point may be expanded. If moral evil and human suffering serve a constructive end, how can we imagine it to be God's will that we be saved from them? (except afterwards, and by way of a mild tidying up exercise!)

At first glance Farrer and Forsyth might seem to represent good but typical members of these two different kinds of discussion of evil. Is not Farrer a philosophical theist? Does he not, in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* approach the problems of evil and God largely by means of a classification of evils that distances God from them? Does not Forsyth explicitly reject as immoral the practice of philosophical theodicy? Does he not even indicate that the central questions that philosophical discussions of evil tackle are undecidable<sup>2</sup>?

If Forsyth were addressing himself to what I have described as the characteristic theological questions about God and evil, and Farrer were addressing himself to the characteristic philosophical ones, then it would seem that they could have little enough fundamentally in common to make the synthesis, towards which this chapter is working, possible.

I wish to argue, however that at the heart of Forsyth and Farrer's arguments, and at the root of the three striking similarities that I

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1. *Evil and the God of Love* Pg.353.

2. *The Justification of God* p.139

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have outlined, lies a concern for Christian integrity in the face of evil. Forsyth and Farrer are concerned for Christians who experience evil and are aware of the ambiguity of evil as it relates to their experience of God. They are concerned specifically that the lack of an intellectual structure for integrating these experiences may disable, dis-integrate their faith and their lives.

The distinction between this, and the philosophical and theological approaches to evil, in the previous paragraphs should not, perhaps, be too sharply drawn. The Theology of evil bears on Christian integrity because it is attempting to make the Christian experience comprehensible, and the philosophical approach to the problem of evil does the same, because it is attempting to make Christian belief tenable. Nevertheless there is a sense in which the believer can feel that neither the purely theological approach to evil, nor the purely philosophical approaches to the problem of evil do justice to the complexity of the Christian experience of evil.

For example, it is obviously possible to rework the characteristic question of the philosophy of religion, so that it bears on Christian integrity, that is the integration of the experience of God and of the world. If, as I have suggested, the characteristic question is "What limitations does our experience of evil, and the presence of evil in the world, place upon our notion of or belief in God?" the philosophy of religion in this context bears on Christian integrity by curbing unrealistic expectations.

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There is however, a sense in which the believer faced with this approach may feel that somehow the point has been missed, and that all the characteristic ways that a believer actually deals with this tension, e.g. prayer, reflection upon the fundamentals of faith, (creation, incarnation, atonement, sanctification and so forth), are not being appealed to. The philosophical critic seems to say "show me how, in integrity, you can reconcile this experience of a loving God, with the experience of an evil world. When we have convinced ourselves, by this means, that God, in general, is possible, we shall discuss what your religion claims to tell us in detail about His nature and purposes."

Without insisting that Christians should discuss with their critics only the Bible or the Creeds, there is a certain absurdity to this. To be asked how one, with integrity, may construe one's experience as indicating the presence of a loving and almighty God, presiding over a world full of evil, is one thing. To be asked to do so without reference to the particular language, symbolic structure and revelation by which one does in fact seek integrity through the reconstruction of one's experience is to ask for something far more paradoxical. In short, If philosophical theodicy really worked, there would have been no need to "invent" Christianity.

If we may accuse the philosophical approach to God and evil of failing to make provision for the way in which believers actually do attempt to resolve the tensions that the experience of evil sets up, it will be clear that the accusation against theological approaches to God and evil



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is likely to be the converse. It would of course be absurd to deny that the characteristic question of Theology about God and evil has bearing on Christian integrity in the face of evil. If that question is "How does God deal with evil? What can we learn about God from evil, and from what we discern to be God's way with evil?", then Theology is asking the central question that faithful people ask in the face of evil. But in the face of evil we are not all faithful, or not all of us is faithful. Faith does indeed seek understanding, but, at least for morally sensitive people, in the face of evil, continuation in faith depends upon at least a certain degree of understanding.

What I have attempted in setting out the similarities that I discern between Forsyth and Farrer, so far in this chapter, may be taken as an indication that the interpretation of their fundamental concerns that one might make "at first glance" is actually deceptive. Farrer's agenda is not primarily that of the philosopher of religion, nor is Forsyth's primarily that of the theologian of evil.

Because of the ambiguity in the experience of evil that lies at the centre of the notions of contingency and the evangelical experience of redemption, Forsyth and Farrer are each effectively trying to integrate in one view of God and evil concerns that are characteristic of both the theological and the philosophical discussions of God and evil. I have argued that Forsyth and Farrer are not writing philosophy of religion (at least on one definition), because they are not, in the end, appealing to reason to justify or license faith. We could say, further,

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that they are not writing a Theology of evil (at least on one definition), because they do, in the end, treat evil specifically as a problem to faith.

### **6.6 Working for Integration**

It would be unfortunate if the necessarily rather abstract discussions of this chapter were allowed to obscure the basically rather concrete point that it is attempting to make. The emphasis on lay Christianity, on the awareness of a specific kind of ambiguity in the Christian experience of evil, the unwillingness to abandon the perspective of the believing subject, and on the promotion of a particularly integrated approach to the discussion of God and evil have, effectively, a single simple purpose. The purpose is to take ordinary, morally sensitive Christian believers through the bewildering and apparently contradictory implications of their experience of evil. By providing them with a structure for understanding that experience, the purpose is to enable them to continue to trust the fundamental intuitions of their own relationship to God around which they have sought to construct their lives.

The purpose at all points is integration; the integration of belief, of experience, of action and of thought. A book can only contribute to the complex interplay of belief, experience, thought and action that Forsyth and Farrer envisage, on one level. But it seems to me that Forsyth and Farrer have identified very specific locations for their arguments

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within that complex that makes up the life of ordinary believers, and that they have in consequence a very distinctive sense of the contribution that their reflections might make to the "solution" of the problem of evil.

We are left perhaps with a final task of integration. For all the similarities and parallels that I have sought to outline Forsyth and Farrer are basing their approaches to the discussion of God and evil on intuitions which, while they may have a degree of congruence, are fundamentally different. It would be hopeless to contend that the Evangelical experience of redemption is the same thing as the experience of contingency, or that in any very simple way they are different sides of the same coin. What I shall seek to establish in the next chapter, however, is that they may be construed as different, and partial, intuitions or experiences of the same God, Three in One.

They are both writing to promote the integration, in faith, (that is in belief and life) of the experience of believers. It is this fundamental concern that makes it possible to seek for synthesis between their arguments. It is the differences between the fundamental experiences to which they appeal that makes the possibility of a synthesis interesting. In the next chapter, I shall argue that these differences may profitably be construed in terms of Trinitarian thought, and advocate an outline of a Trinitarian synthesis of the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer.

### **6.7 Problems with Certainty and Freedom**

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In the argument of this chapter so far I have attempted to show some similarities between the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer that operate at something like the most deeply felt levels of theological discussion. I have suggested that their understanding of the sources of theological truth, and their understandings of the theological nature of evil show marked convergences. The concern for Christian integrity in the face of evil, for the perspective of the believing subject, for a particular view of the relationship between faith, action, belief and understanding all point to the possibility of much more common ground than might at first be suggested by a comparison of these authors.

There is however a level of the discussion which looks less promising. What we have so far may be reckoned, at best, a moral and methodological reconciliation of the arguments. Even if the theological reconciliation is postponed to the next chapter, to be dealt with in a Trinitarian structure, a question remains about the feasibility of a metaphysical reconciliation.

The problem is quite acute. If, as I have suggested, Forsyth depends upon a metaphysics of certainty, and Farrer upon a metaphysics of freedom, there is every possibility that their arguments will, in the end, contradict each other, rather than complement each other. Is it really possible for us to take on these two arguments into a synthetic structure, if Forsyth wishes us to talk in terms of the certainty of Salvation, and Farrer wishes to talk in be able to talk in terms of freedom of creation? Can the essentially secure and governed process of

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a completed triumph working itself out in time be reckoned congruent with the dynamic process of God's contriving will bringing goods of a specific kind out of the unfolding evils of the world?

I had occasion in the discussion of the argument of *The Justification of God* to raise the question whether Forsyth was a determinist, a question which I left at that point with the observation that Forsyth is tied in to a particular form of the ancient paradox of human freedom in relation to divine knowledge and power. What freedom is possible if we are to be able to say that all the evil that there ever was, or ever will be, was present, active and condemned at the Cross? The point might perhaps be put in reverse, so that the boot is on Forsyth's foot, rather than Farrer's. There is a very great deal of freedom in Farrer's understanding of the nature of creation. Is it really possible to correlate this picture of a semi-chaos, even a semi-chaos within a structure of divine providence, with the kind of security and completeness that Forsyth takes to be an essential characteristic of the evangelical experience of redemption? Can Farrer's God Himself be sure of His capacity to guide and guard His creation. How does Farrer believe we experience God as "Almighty" rather than just "contriving".

It would be wrong to think that this difference is fundamentally a difference about the place of certainty. Both Forsyth and Farrer are looking for a certainty in the divine operation in the world, although the varieties of certainty differ. Forsyth, as I have argued at some length, is looking for a certainty that relates to the working out in

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time of a conquest of evil that is already, in some eternal sense, complete. Farrer however is also looking for a certainty. When he discusses the parable of 4 Esdras, he has, I believe, a sketch of a theodicy that is entirely congruent with his overall understanding of the nature of the relationship between the finite world, and the infinite<sup>1</sup>. But 4 Esdras, as Farrer presents it, leaves open the possibility of the condemnation of human beings through no fault of their own. The certainty for which Farrer is arguing is the certainty that none will be condemned by God, or will fail to respond to God's offer of salvation, except through their own fault<sup>2</sup>.

There is a difference in the kind of certainty, and that difference is a difference of tense. Both Forsyth and Farrer believe that God's power is at work in the world, bringing it securely to its appointed end, but for Forsyth the focus of that power is an eternal and accomplished act, the death of Christ on the Cross. For Farrer it is a future and eternal fact, the revelation of the Glory of Christ, in his Church, at the point of judgment.

I do not believe that it is possible, in the end, to combine the fullness of Forsyth's certainty, with the fullness of Farrer's freedom. The strongest indication that this is not possible seems to me to be the different understanding of the scope of the salvation wrought in the

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*. P.120

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* P.130

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Cross. Forsyth is explicit that the salvation in the Cross is salvation, in the end, for all people. Farrer at least holds open the possibility of the final rejection of the revelation of God at the point of judgment. Any attempt to work with the metaphysical structures of Forsyth and Farrer in an unmodified form is likely to come up against this problem of reconciliation. It is a problem that goes to the centre of Forsyth's commitment to certainty of a specific kind, and Farrer's commitment to freedom.

It is not altogether implausible, however, to see these metaphysical differences as complementary. The question, in the end, is one about the relationship between eternity and time. Forsyth's concentration on a completed work inevitably gravitates towards an understanding of reality in terms of eternity. Farrer's concentration on guided freedom inevitably gravitates towards an understanding of reality in terms of the passage of time.

The point perhaps can be most clearly made in connection with the "two pictures" that I suggested help us to understand Forsyth's theodicy. Forsyth has a strong picture of the eternal relation of all persons to the Cross of Christ, and one of the most attractive aspects of his thought is the way that he links the specific means of God's operation in time, with the election, judgment and sorrow present at the Cross as a historical event. The question in hand, therefore, is, If we supplement Forsyth's understanding of God's operation in time with Farrer's more complex and subtle account of the same topic, can we

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retain Forsyth's understanding of the eternal importance of the Cross, and its unmediated influence upon history?

I do not think that it is possible, in the end, fully to unravel the riddle of the relationship of eternity and time. We may note that it is an ancient one. We may note that there is now no simple and obvious concept of time available to the skeptic who might wish to use it as a standpoint from which to criticise the obscure and paradoxical nature of the concept of eternity.

On the more specific matter of supplementing Forsyth's account of God-in-time with Farrer's, it does not seem that the difficulties are insuperable. Present at the Cross, no less than Forsyth's chosen categories of election, judgment and sorrow, are Farrer's fundamental realities: Creation operating in accordance with its internal constitution, and yet subject to God's power to bring goods of a specific kind out of any evil.

What should be clear, in relation to time and eternity, is that both are necessary for any full Christian faith. The *Once-for-All* nature of the Cross must be construed in a way that respects the freedom of persons, without which it becomes a matter of coercion. At the same time, however, it must be construed in a way that makes it possible for the Cross to be an immediate fact in peoples lives irrespective of the temporal distance of those lives from the life and death of Christ.



## THE TRINITY AT WORK

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How the doctrine of the Trinity can sharpen our understanding of Forsyth and Farrer, and how, for Christians, evil is at root a Trinitarian problem.

#### 7.1 Using Trinitarian Theology

I wish to argue in this chapter for the appropriateness of a Trinitarian approach to the discussion of God and evil, and I would seek to justify this on two grounds. The first is practical and experimental. I think that it can be shown that a Trinitarian analysis of the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer throws their virtues and shortcomings into sharper relief, and indeed that their arguments have strong, if implicit, Trinitarian quality. The second is systematic. I believe that the Christian dilemma in the face of evil has a Trinitarian quality, and invites a Trinitarian discussion.

When Forsyth and Farrer's arguments are construed in a Trinitarian fashion, it becomes easier to see the shortcomings of their arguments, and especially the extent to which their strengths and weaknesses are complementary. The synthesis which in the last chapter I argued that we might seek, because of the broad similarities of intention and

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commitment, becomes in this light, something best attempted on the basis of a Trinitarian scheme.

I shall be arguing that Forsyth and Farrer's arguments effectively relocate the tension brought about for Christians by the apparently contradictory experiences of God and evil. The tension is relocated, and to a certain extent resolved by construing it as a tension within the Christian experience of the immanent Trinity.

This will lead us to the second, systematic, and more important reason for bringing Trinitarian considerations to bear on the discussion of God and evil; that the Christian dilemma in the face of evil is probably best understood as having a distinctly Trinitarian character. For Christians the challenge posed by the experience of evil is not really a matter of reconciling experiences of the world with an experience, or experiences of God, as a sympathetic philosopher might imagine. It is more a matter of attempting to construe all one's experiences as the of the work of one God, as one enterprise. In this context the doctrine of the Trinity supplies a vital conceptual richness.

### 7.2 Trinitarian Analysis, A First Pass

There is of course a wide range of Trinitarian thought, and it is necessary to set out, if only roughly, the variety that I hold to be useful in this context. I shall begin by considering the immanent Trinity, rather than the economic Trinity and as a first pass at the

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question I shall indicate how a reasonably robust understanding of the different functions of the Persons of the Trinity provides us with tools to understand some of the apparently divergent experiences we have of God and evil <sup>1</sup>.

A great deal of discussion of God and evil, both in academic Theology and in Christian preaching, goes on without particular reference to the doctrine of the Trinity. This is particularly true where the relationship between God and evil is being considered at its most general. A Christian might pray for the comfort of the Holy Spirit in specific circumstances of pain and distress, or seek in devotion to associate that pain and distress with the sufferings of Christ, but when the topic is approached generally and "dispassionately" these perspectives are all too often ignored.

In the last chapter I indicated that one could to some extent trace this Trinitarian silence back to the roots of modern theodicy in time of Leibniz. It seems to me that it has unfortunate consequences even beyond the separation of the discussion of God and evil from the realities of Christian faith and practice. So much discussion of God and evil still breathes the air of Hume and Locke, and judges the God of the enlightenment by the criteria of the enlightenment. Specifically, it seems to imply that the application of human reason to the domain of

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1. TeSelle has some interesting causal or volitional reflections on the Trinity in the essay *Divine Action, the Doctrinal Tradition* in the collection *Divine Action*, *Hebblethwaite B. & Henderson E.*

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human experience should determine whether the world is a fit place for human beings. If not, then the God who is charged with having, in some way, set it all going, fails to match the expectations we have of him, and probably does not exist.

From the perspective of Trinitarian faith, this pattern of argument seems to bear most clearly on our understanding of God the Father in his capacity as "Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth". However, even without digging any deeper into the Christian understanding of God, the very use of the word "father" begins to separate us from the perspective of that kind of unitarian theism which tends in places towards deism. Parents understand things that children do not, and purpose things, on behalf of their children, that those children can will only in retrospect. Parents with more than one child balance the competing claims of their offspring, and, characteristically, this need to find such a balance is an enrichment rather than an impoverishment of all concerned. Our relationship to and understanding of God our Father is immediately, if subtly, different from that which we might have with God, a Creator.

But, classically, Christianity teaches that God is more than Father, that in fact God is Trinity. The implications of this for the understanding of the relationship of God and evil are immense. If "God our Father" is a very different proposition from "God, a Creator", then "God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" is even further from the God of the enlightenment. If God is Trinity, and if the triune nature of God has any significance in the world at all, then it is bound to affect the way

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we understand the relationship between God and evil. It may be of great significance, for example, that aspects within the creation, that might seem perverse, become comprehensible in the context of salvation and sanctification.

In short, any attempt to understand the relationship between God and evil must have in mind, if only schematically, the totality of the divine work. However, I shall not attempt to elaborate, at this point, an integrated Trinitarian understanding of the relationship between God and evil. I shall put forward, for each person of the Trinity, an example of the implications of Trinitarian thought in this area. They are examples with clear echoes in the work of Forsyth and Farrer, and may be taken as pointers to the important, but implicit, Trinitarian nature of their arguments.

I have already given a first notion of the implications of conceiving God as Father, when I drew the rather rough distinction between the creator God of the enlightenment, and the first person of the Trinity. I do not wish to suggest that there is anything wrong with addressing questions about God and evil in terms of the relationship between creature and creator. There are, within the creedal phrase "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth" materials for the construction of the question about God and evil that one associates with the practice of philosophical theodicy.

But that characteristic question is too limited, even if we restrict our

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range of consideration to the first person of the Trinity. If God is construed as "Creator" within philosophical theodicy, it is usually only by way of attaching the blame or credit for the way things are to him. It is seldom that the implications of the creator/creature relationship are invoked in the attempt to understand the relationship between God and evil. It is not usual in such discussion to find reference to the Father's purpose in creation, (except perhaps in connection with the freewill defence), or any reference to duties that he may, as creator, lay upon himself in relation to his non-human creatures.

By contrast, Farrer in particular may be understood as taking God the Father seriously in his understanding of the relationship of God and evil, in that he dedicates so much of his discussion to an illumination of the divine purpose in creation, and to the relationship between creator and creature. By addressing the question of the relationship between God and evil in terms of this Christian teaching Farrer produces a much more practical and recognisable picture of the relationship between God and his creatures than, for example, the notion of "omnipotence" will usually supply.

We find, if anything, even less reference made, in other discussions of God and evil, to God's faithfulness as a redeemer. It is clearly of significance to our attempt to understand the relationship between God and moral evil, that God is held to make available to his moral creatures the possibility of redemption. On a practical level the importance of this offer may be its direct personal significance. If

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Forsyth is correct, we find ourselves to be at once made in the image of God, and fatally flawed. It is of crucial importance to our attempt to understand the relationship between God and evil that we discern the possibility of a resolution of this tension in the offer of redemption through the Son.

But even if this consideration may be set aside, as, for these purposes, too individualistic and subjective for the general discussion of the relationship between God and evil, the more general point cannot. A very great deal of the evil and suffering in the world is the result of free and sinful human actions. No theistic attempt can be made to understand this that does not take a view on the nature of human freedom, and the nature of the divine assistance available to resolve the contradictions in human nature. Christians interpret moral evil, and the suffering caused by moral evil, within a scheme of freedom, fall and redemption. This may be intellectually incoherent, but it makes little sense for them to prop it up by reference to some other approach.

If we are to seek to live our lives as redeemed creatures, Christianity classically teaches us that we can only do so by dependence upon the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit is our comforter, our strengthener in the face of evil and suffering, then the existence of this person of the trinity must be understood as a palliation of that evil and suffering. God's presence with us in our suffering, and his presumed presence with other people in their suffering, and his capacity for leading them in and through that suffering, is not less important to a realistic

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Christian understanding of the relationship of God and evil, than his nature as Father and Redeemer.

I have deliberately stuck to a fairly simple classification of the work of the persons of the immanent Trinity in the preceding paragraphs. My intention has been to highlight the way in which the invocation of the doctrine of the Trinity has its own very specific problems in this context. A philosophically minded person faced with the rather unintegrated understanding of the divine operation that I have just sketched in could, quite appropriately, feel that discussion along these lines is more likely to confuse the issue (or to make it three times as complicated) than to clarify it.

More specifically, it might be appropriate for such a person to argue that the central question that is tackled by the philosophical discussion of God and evil, is here not being addressed, so much as passed around. Why is there evil in the world? It does not apparently help us to answer this question, that the Son redeems us, and the Spirit comforts us in the face of that evil. At worst, it might be argued, this use of the doctrine of the Trinity seeks to resolve the problems posed to belief in God by the existence of evil, by proposing three gods, pursuing competing projects.

A caricature can have its uses, and I hope to show that Forsyth and Farrer are nothing like so crude in their implicit use of Trinitarian categories. Specifically, this first discussion of the implications of



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Trinitarian thought should highlight the way in which the discussion of the unity and diversity of divine purposing in the world is likely to have strong analogies with the discussion of the unity and diversity of the Trinitarian divine nature. Does God have three ways with evil in the world, as creator, redeemer and comforter, or does he have one? Is redemption at once present in creation, and separable from it? Can we move beyond the (surely unacceptable) notion of the work one person of the Trinity as a palliation of the sin and suffering in creation? If there is a lesson to be learnt from these crudities, it is that the immanent and economic understandings of the Trinity can only be separated in our minds, and then only at our peril.

### 7.3 Forsyth and the Trinity

In the opening paragraphs of my reconstruction of the argument of *The Justification of God*, I proposed that his argument could be summed up in three sentences: 1) All the evil and failure of the world was present, and finally dealt with, at Calvary. 2) The way the world goes can only be understood in the light of God's way with the world, as revealed in the Cross. 3) Attempts to understand the way the world goes, which do not centre on God's moral and redemptive nature are doomed to futility and contradiction.

Even in this highly compressed form, it is possible to highlight the Trinitarian dynamic of this pattern of argument. In particular we should consider what Forsyth means when he implies that evil was "finally dealt

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with" at Calvary. The phrase "finally dealt with" conceals a complex and dynamic concept of judgment.

Judgment, of course, is first and foremost to be associated with the Father. One of the more disturbing themes of *The Justification of God* is Forsyth's suggestion that the war itself is a judgment of God, on the egoism of European society. There is a degree of uncertainty in the text about whether such judgment should be considered as a more or less direct imposition of the divine will, or as the ironic recoil upon the evil that human beings do, upon themselves. Either way, judgment is associated with God in creation. There is a moral texture, or a moral grain to the universe, and disaster ensues if human beings ignore this or try to work against it.

The function and purpose of Forsyth's argument, however, is not simply to point out the appropriateness of the judgment that is falling on society. Judgment in the Son is redemptive. All the evil of the World and of all time is concentrated at the Cross, and judged, and condemned. Forsyth does not attach himself in *The Justification of God* to any one theory of atonement, although he does explicitly reject substitutionary patterns of thought. What is important is for us to notice that that judgment which, in the Father is essentially condemnatory, in the Son is essentially redemptive. Evil is "done away with" in the judgment of the Cross, making way for God's victory over it in time.

If the working out of the divine purpose in time may be considered the

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operation of the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit also shares in the dynamic of Judgment. It is essential to Forsyth's argument, that God's way with evil, discerned in our experience through time, and His way with evil at the Cross, an "intersection of time and eternity", should be the same. If God works in the Cross by judgment, then He works in time by judgment. It is in this light that we may understand Forsyth's concept of "saving judgment". Some of the evils of the world may, Forsyth argues, be understood as saving judgment, a process in time that is essentially congruent with, and dependent upon the saving judgment of the Cross.

If it is possible to see Forsyth's constructive argument to a large extent in terms of a Trinitarian reworking of a theme of judgment that we associate with the Father, it is also possible to see his critical argument in terms of a rejection of a misappropriation of the work of the Spirit. The working out of the divine purpose in time proceeds by judgment and redemption, and redemption is specifically associated with the evangelical experience of redemption. Secular society has sought its own egoist and commercial forms of redemption, and that has led to the judgment of War. The Churches, Free and Catholic, have sought to associate that experience with human creations. The free churches have invested their spiritual capital, so to speak, in the busy activity of charitable human endeavour, and the catholic in solemnities of human theological constructions.

It follows that the underlying problem for which Forsyth is seeking

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redress is one produced by these varieties of over confidence in the human appropriation of the work of the spirit. Faced with the war these confidences have collapsed. The redemption cannot be denied by those who have experienced it. Nevertheless, the subjective certainty produced by the work of the Spirit on the soul in conversion can be disturbed and, more importantly rendered ineffectual or impotent. The work of the Spirit in time, Forsyth is arguing, needs constantly to be referred back to its source in the death of Christ.

A fairly straightforward reformulation of Forsyth's argument in Trinitarian terms is thus available to us. The evils of the world are judgment of the Father, and made into redemptive judgment in the Son, on the Cross, and one may have an eternal confidence in the Spirit in fulfilling this through time by means of saving judgment, which takes the form of the redemption of individuals, and, sometimes, of the condemnation of corporate entities, such as nations and peoples.

### 7.4 Farrer and the Trinity

*Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is undoubtedly a simpler book than *The Justification of God*, and to a certain extent the very unity and coherence of the underlying argument makes divisions, such as those I have been proposing for Forsyth, less easy. The argument does however lend itself to a Trinitarian recasting, if perhaps less comprehensively than Forsyth's work. It could be argued that Farrer's main intellectual legacy to philosophical Theology is the principle of double causation.

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Farrer's achievement is to provide us with what appears to be a coherent way of understanding the world as at once rule-following and predictable, in the way, and to the extent, set forth by natural science, and at the same time subject, in a practical and significant way, to the divine will.

God's faithfulness to his creation as its Creator is clearly understood in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* in terms of his respect for the causal integrity of his creatures, his willingness to allow them to be themselves, and to make themselves in accordance with their own natural internal principles. It is perhaps not too much of an abuse of his argument, or of the patterns of Trinitarian thought, to identify God's on-going and reactive will, what I have called his "contriving will" with the Holy Spirit in creation. God the Creator wills that things should be, and that they should be themselves. God, through the Holy Spirit wills that those things should be guided, within their natural resources, beyond themselves. On the broader canvas this may be understood as the hidden hand in the evolutionary process, if that is indeed how things came to be the way they are. On the narrower canvas of individual lives, the work of the Holy Spirit is what we discern, if only in retrospect, of individual divine willing in our lives and experience <sup>1</sup>.

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1. Hebblethwaite, in *Religious Studies* Vol.14 (1978), indicates that he is happy to admit discernible divine operation in evolution, but not in response to prayer, because the time scale is so short. He would regard this understanding of Farrer as retrograde.

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It is Farrer's contention that God guides human beings to their goal of full, but independent, communion with himself by means that are appropriate to their nature as human. He is unwilling to believe, for example, that God could, or would, complete his work of salvation by creating *ab extra* redeemed personalities in those who have not responded to his call<sup>1</sup>. In this scheme the Son has a place that is quite clear. The work of the Son is primarily exemplary. At least in *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* the Christ shows forth the Glory of God<sup>2</sup>. In this way the Son makes an irreplaceable contribution to the completion of human nature, one that is appropriate to that human nature, and one that is crucially dependent upon his own faithfulness in a human nature.

### 7.5 Using the Trinitarian Analysis

There would be little point in recasting the thought of Forsyth and Farrer in this Trinitarian mode if it did not in some way illuminate their arguments, and the relationship between their arguments. It does seem, however, that we can discern some very particular similarities in approach that are clarified for us by this Trinitarian analysis.

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1. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* P. 119.

2. There is an attractive synergy between the thought of Forsyth and Farrer in connection with the self consciousness of Christ. Forsyth writes of the *Plerosis* of Christ, as by obedience Christ "rediscovers" his Godhead. If that obedience can be construed in terms of learning to draw upon the first causality of God, rather than upon his human strength, then it would be possible to see Christ's growing understanding of himself as exemplary, providing us with the right pattern of human dependence upon the first causality of God.

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The first, and most obvious point is that the tension in Christian experience, which is usually presented as a tension between an idea or experience of God, and experience of the world, is relocated by both authors within the Trinity. Forsyth is seeking a means to adjust our experience of a world full of evil, to our understanding of the overwhelming experience of the Son through the Spirit, by reference to the continuing judgment of the Father. Forsyth writes of the appropriateness of the Father's judgment in this world, of the "completed" quality of the work of Christ, and the "continuing" quality of the work of the Spirit. In so doing, he provides theological location for the experience of evil and chaos, for the final and secure quality of the evangelical experience of redemption, and for a Christian understanding of God as active and working in history.

Farrer, on the other hand, may be understood as dividing our experience more nearly in two. We experience the world as created by God in a way that is orderly, rule-following, comprising entities that are allowed a degree of genuine independence. On the other hand we experience God as involved in his creation in detail. Our experience of moral and physical evil we may associate, on this Trinitarian scheme, with the effects of the faithfulness of God the Father in his creation; his granting of permission for entities that he has created to be themselves. Our experience of God's capacity to bring appropriate good out of any circumstances, and of God's personal involvement in, for example, the formation of our personalities, we may understand as God the Holy Spirit at work in the texture of our contingency.

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I have laid considerable emphasis in my discussions of Forsyth and Farrer upon the value of their understandings of the ambiguity of the Christian experience of evil, and in particular the way that we are drawn to God by our experience of evil as much as we are drawn away. In each case, it seems that the re-understanding of the evil we experience as actually revelatory of the presence and nature of God, is dependent upon an understanding of the nature of the cooperation of the persons of the Trinity.

In Forsyth, the central Christian experience, the experience that is most characteristically revelatory of the divine nature and purpose, is the evangelical experience of redemption. But this is inevitably also an experience of human nature as fallen, as standing under the judgment of the Father. If evil is experienced as the consequence of judgment, and history is experienced as the domain of the Spirit working out saving judgment, (a process whose certainty is underwritten by the completed work of the Cross), then this ambiguity in the Christian experience of evil is to be resolved within the Trinity. Judgment is of the Father, redemption by the Son through the Spirit. To put the matter another way, If Forsyth can lead us to an understanding of judgment and redemption as different, but coherent aspects, of the work of the one God, then his integration will be complete.

Farrer, on the other hand, discerns an ambiguity in Christian experience which he presents in terms of contingency. On the one hand our



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contingency is our inability to be and to do all that we wish, and the way we are subject to the being and the doing of our fellow creatures. On the other hand our contingency is also the basic form of our relationship with God, and our role is to make good our contingency by dependence upon the first causality of God. What Farrer seems to be doing, when one considers his argument in a Trinitarian light, is to associate those aspects of our contingency that are, from an anthropocentric point of view, negative, such as our liability to the negative impact of other entities acting in accordance with their nature, with the faithfulness of God the Father to his creation as a whole. If my Trinitarian approach to Farrer is accepted, however, our constructive dependence upon the First Causality of God, and God's constructive capacity to bring good out of evil may be understood as the work of God mediated through the Holy Spirit.

Bringing a Trinitarian light to bear on the arguments of Farrer and Forsyth does not only help us to clarify the nature of their arguments. It helps also, I believe, to clarify their shortcomings. The central shortcoming that I wish to concentrate upon is one which is most clearly discernible when we consider them together. It is obvious that we are both fallen and contingent. To concentrate too much on one or other is to leave alarming gaps in one's understanding of evil.

Forsyth and Farrer present us with ways of understanding the relationship between God and evil that arise very specifically from the crucial intuitions upon which they base their arguments. Thus it is that

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Forsyth, true to his original intuition of moral inadequacy, offers a theodicy of salvation. It is a moral theodicy, full of insight into the moral nature of God's saving work. It is relatively silent, however, about the creating work of God. He gives us a hint or two about the "First Creation" and the second, but it cannot be said that Forsyth really attempts to explain why God should have created in the way that he did<sup>1</sup>.

On the other hand Farrer is true to his original intuition of contingency. In this respect he can be understood either as complementing, or contradicting Forsyth. He offers a theodicy of creation. The problem with the world is not that it is fallen, fundamentally, but that it is half-created/half chaos. The problem with human beings is analogous to the problems faced by trees growing on poor soil. It is not construed as a moral fault, so much as a failure to flourish in accordance with God's will. The discussion of God's saving work can seem almost an afterthought; Salvation is the completion of creation, not a radical new departure within creation.

It is possible, therefore, in terms of a formal Trinitarian Theology, to sharpen the difference between Forsyth and Farrer, and to indicate

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1. The best indication that Forsyth gives of the relationship of the first creation and the second creation is to be found in *The Christian Ethic of War*, quoted by Rodgers (op cit. Pg. 198). *The first creation, with its providential course, was made for the second, and only comes home in it, though by way of creation and not evolution, of redemption and not development. Conversely, the second creation has all along been reacting on the first, and moulding it. Nature, if not the Mother, is the matrix of Grace. Salvation is the ground plan of creation, and the primum mobile of Nature itself.*

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precisely how they are contradictory (or complementary). If creation is through the Son, and salvation is by the Son, Forsyth and Farrer have chosen to emphasise different elements in the function of the Son. Forsyth has provided us with an account of Salvation which to a large extent fails to indicate the relationship between the creative purpose of God, and his redeeming purpose. Farrer, on the other hand, seems only inadequately to have separated them. In his account, the creative and redeeming purposes of God are a seamless web, so that it seems almost superfluous to speak of the latter.

Put this way, of course, the shortcomings are obvious. Against Forsyth, we can say that the Son by whom we are saved is the Son through whom we were created. You can't have one without the other. But, on the other hand, against Farrer, we can say that it is difficult to sustain a real sense of the divinity of Christ, the reality of the incarnation, or the irreplaceable significance of the Cross on the basis of a picture of the redeeming Son who is solely exemplary: Humanity perfected. There seems to be a danger that Farrer will move the Son out of the Trinity. Nor can these considerations be dismissed as relating solely to the technical discussion of obscure and possibly obsolete doctrines. Trinitarian Theology can be used as a kind of theological shorthand but it can also be a kind of theological straitjacket. In this connection at least, to misconstrue the Trinity, is not so much a matter of breaking some technical theological rules. It is to misunderstand ourselves, and our relationship with God.

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It is not hard to show, for example, that elements in the arguments of these authors that might cause us concern, are in fact associated with this separation or confusion of the creating and redeeming roles of the Son. This can be seen even in connection with the fundamental intuitions that, I have been arguing, give rise to their discussion of the relationship between God and evil. Farrer approaches our experience of evil by insisting on the importance of the *genuine freedom* of our creation, if we are to love God. Forsyth approaches our experience of evil by insisting on the completeness of the change that has been wrought in us by our *redemption*, which will make it possible for us to love God. These are vital, and it is important for us, in attempting to understand the relationship between God and evil to bear in mind our creation and our redemption.

But both are important. Love for God is not just the result of a full measure of freedom. It is the result of redemption. On the other hand, love for God cannot be considered real love without freedom. We need something like Farrer's understanding of freedom and something like Forsyth's understanding of redemption to give anything like a full picture. The life we are called to lead, by the Spirit, in relationship with God, is both free and redeemed. It is a life where we are at one and the same time in a relationship with the Creator and the Redeemer.

It is no coincidence, of course, that these different ways of looking at evil generate different understandings of the life and work of Christ. Forsyth is looking for victory over evil, and his emphasis is very much

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on the Crucifixion, rather than the life or teaching of Christ. In Forsyth the redeeming Son is central, and to a certain extent the object of *The Justification of God* is to refer the "subjective" certainties engendered by the Spirit in the evangelical experience of redemption back to the objective certainty, in which that experience takes its origin, the Cross.

Farrer, by contrast, is looking for a pattern we can follow, (perhaps because a pattern is precisely what we need in our enterprise of drawing upon first causality?)<sup>1</sup>. His interest is obviously in the life of Christ, and his teaching<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of Christ's life, and to a certain extent the object of *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* is to enable us to understand, and thus depend upon, the continuing purposing of God in the World, which I have associated with the Holy Spirit.

### 7.6 Keeping the Spirit

I have sought to show how the highlighting of Trinitarian categories in connection with the thought of Forsyth and Farrer can illuminate the points of similarity and difference in their thought. It may by now be apparent that any attempt to achieve a stable synthesis of their thought is likely to depend upon an integration that attempts to resolve the

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1. Cf. *Finite and Infinite* P. 90. Farrer is here discussing the nature of revelation and history, but he assumes that the Christ's relationship to the Christian is, to a significant extent, exemplary.

2. *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* P. 128.

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differences in Trinitarian terms. It seems to me that the understanding of the nature of love as free and redeemed, that I mentioned a few paragraphs back provides us with a hint as to the proper direction in which a synthetic project should proceed.

If we are indicating a direction for synthesis, however, it is important that we do not lose the main qualities of the original. The striking thing about Forsyth and Farrer, for example, is the way that they hang on to their central notions of the Christian experience of God and evil, and seek to integrate their thought around these intuitions. In itself this has considerable virtues. It has the merit of relative simplicity, and, if it is true to itself, of staying in touch with the belief of ordinary believers.

There is also a healthy, if not necessarily explicit, emphasis to be found in Forsyth and Farrer, upon the work of the Spirit; God-With-Us now. If we are pressing for a more balanced understanding of the significance of the Creator and Redeemer we must look for it in a way that does not diminish this personal, experiential, foundation.

### 7.7 Love, Contingency, and Fallen Human Nature

Throughout my discussion of Forsyth and Farrer I have emphasised the way in which their arguments depend upon construing experiences in a particular way. Specifically, I have suggested that they each take an ambiguity in the Christian experience of evil, and that they have worked

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up from this base to sophisticated understandings of the relationship of God and evil. It does not seem likely that an indication of a direction for synthesis between these two arguments is going to be plausible unless this distinctive structural character is honoured and maintained. The emphasis on ambiguity is integral to their arguments, and, I would maintain, is the really interesting thing about their arguments.

Is there another area of ambiguous Christian experience to which we might appeal to make a start towards a synthetic understanding of Forsyth and Farrer? It seems to me that we have, within our own experience of ourselves as bearers and practitioners of love an experience that bears a close relationship both to the experience of "fallen nature redeemed" and the experience of "contingency supplied". Love and its failures seem to be close enough to both the fundamental experiences of Forsyth's and Farrer's arguments, without coming too close to either of them. Our experience of love points us towards God, and amounts to an intuition of God, even in its failure, in a way that is strongly reminiscent of Forsyth and Farrer.

A number of similarities spring to mind. Our experiences of ourselves as fallen and contingent are ambiguous precisely because the qualities in those experiences which point us away from God also draw us towards him. The same is true of love, or to be more accurate, of love and lovelessness. Any effort or growth in love makes the individual more aware of his or her absence of and feebleness in love, and of the absolute demands love makes. Any deeper awareness of the absence and

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feebleness of love makes the love that is present seem more precious and strange, more like a donation from outside the individual, rather than a spontaneous overflow of human nature. The absence or frustration of love in this world seems to be a prime candidate for disbelief in the God or his goodness. But in fact it is for many the occasion of Faith, and this seems to cry out for positive, rather than skeptical explanation.

I shall discuss later on how I think our experience of love and lovelessness enables us to draw a picture of the relationship of God and evil that combines the outstanding features of Forsyth and Farrer. I wish first to indicate further the relationship between this third fundamental intuition of God and his relationship with evil, and the two that I have been discussing so far. In particular, I wish to ask what qualities, beyond ambiguity, does "love and lovelessness" share with "fallen but redeemed" and "contingent but enabled to draw upon first causality".

In Chapter 3, when discussing the contingency argument, and Farrer's use of it, I suggested that any version of the contingency argument must operate with a logical tension that is set up between an absolute quality, (e.g. Necessity, or Unconditionedness) and a less than absolute version of that quality, which is instantiated in our experience. Clearly our experience of ourselves as bearers and practitioners of love, is something that, at least *prima facie* sets up a tension of precisely this kind. Our experience of our own partial love, and its ineffectiveness seems to be very much the partial instantiation of an



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absolute quality. We should be on familiar territory if we insist that the only satisfactory explanation for the existence of these partial instantiations is the existence of the quality in an absolute form upon which they depend.

This point perhaps needs to be qualified in precisely the way that Farrer would qualify the parallel point about contingency. The presence of the divine element in human love is perfectly hidden. One cannot, at least from the outside, point to the junction of human and divine. A Mother Theresa, or a St Francis may speak with passion of themselves as channels for the love of God, rather than sources of love, and we must believe what they say. But we can never feel that in this or that loving deed, they are any the less Mother Theresa or St Francis. The hand of God does not protrude, so to speak, from the servants through whom God acts in love. Partial love, we may believe, is dependent upon absolute love, and that dependency may be real and practical, but it is not visible.

I have suggested that the experience of "love and lovelessness" shares with the experience "contingent but enabled to draw upon first causality" the qualities of setting up and inhabiting a tension between the absolute and the partial, and of being a real, but hidden, junction of the human and divine. This should be adequate to establish its congruence with Farrer's argument. Where does it stand in relation to the experience "fallen but redeemed"? It seems plausible to suggest that "love and lovelessness" shares also two crucial Forsythian qualities;

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those of Donation, and of full presence at the Cross.

It is essential to Forsyth's pattern of argument that the evangelical experience of the redemption of the soul should come to the soul as something clearly from outside itself. It is this in Forsyth's view that distinguishes real religion from its human surrogates, whether Free Church or Catholic. Love can certainly be felt as donation in this way, and one might go so far as to suggest that some sense of being given a capacity for love is an essential element in the Christian experience of redemption.

No less important for Forsyth's pattern of argument is what he describes as "the eternal cruciality of the Cross". In his distinctive search for a specific variety of certainty, Forsyth is concerned to establish a notion of the co-presence of all time at an eternal point, at the Cross. In particular it is important that all sin and suffering should be present in the Cross, and can therefore be understood as eternally judged and condemned, and dealt with. If love is essentially a donation, "God in us" rather than simply us at our best, then it is reasonable to construe all love as present in Christ at the Cross, in much the same way as Forsyth proposes the presence there of all sin and suffering. There does not seem to be any fundamental tension between this concept of love and the fundamental structure of Forsyth's argument.

It may perhaps be agreed that our experience of love bears a structural resemblance to our experiences of ourselves as fallen and as contingent.

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This does not in itself constitute grounds for a synthesis. It may merely establish the potential starting point for a third and different approach to the understanding of God and evil that would, in its turn, bear a structural resemblance to the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer. In what way, we might ask, does love and lovelessness make a synthesis of Forsyth and Farrer plausible?

It is important that it would be possible to annex this intuition to the arguments of either author. One could see love and lovelessness as a special form or aspect of fallenness, judged and redeemed at the cross. Alternatively one could see it as a special form or aspect of contingency, the negative aspects of which are to be overcome by drawing upon first causality. If Forsyth's is a theodicy based, fundamentally, upon redemption, and Farrer's a theodicy based upon freedom, then the synthetic impetus provided by the introduction of the concept of love should be immediately apparent.

Love is completely central to the Christian understanding of the world. It is also unmistakably free and redeemed. If our failures in love are related to our fallen and contingent human natures, then what love we do bear may be construed as redeemed, and arising from a dependence upon first causality. If the love we do bear is to be construed as redeemed and as arising from first causality, then neither of the arguments we have been discussing is likely to take us the whole way to an understanding of the ambiguous and revelatory nature of love. Each of them fails, to some extent, to address a crucial aspect of the Christian

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experience of love. Both are necessary.

In the end, however, the only way to make the possibility of a synthesis upon this foundation plausible is to indicate a pattern or argument that recognisably draws upon the strengths of both authors, and contradicts neither. What picture of the relationship of God and evil does love and lovelessness direct us towards, and what is the relationship between that picture and the more worked out patterns of thought that we find in Forsyth and Farrer? This, I think, is best understood in terms of the Trinitarian analysis with which this chapter started.

A point that emerges clearly, I hope, from the discussion of Forsyth and Farrer in Trinitarian terms, is that they are both seeking to understand apparently disparate experiences of the divine operation in the world, in terms of a single project. When Forsyth seeks to link up the work of the Spirit in the Evangelical experience of redemption, and the work of the Son in the completed redemption of the world, he is addressing the real certainty of the experience of salvation, and the apparent uncertainty of the divine operation in the world, and seeking to show that the tension is not what it appears; that they are in fact both aspects of one project.

Something similar is true for Farrer. There is a tension between the experience of the world as a place of regularity and established order, on the one hand, and the experience of a providence on the other. I have presented this as a tension between the Father Creator, and the Spirit

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at work in the world. Farrer's argument, and particularly his doctrine of God at work within a framework of multiple causality is all tending to show this as a single project, the bringing into being of rational free beings destined for loving communion with God.

It is towards a deeper notion of the unity of the divine project that the experience of love and lovelessness may direct us. To return to traditional language in Trinitarian thought, Forsyth is offering us a unity of the divine project in redemption and sanctification, and Farrer is offering a unity of the divine project in creation and sanctification. Our own experience of our own love and failures in loves should point us, if it is to be of any significance in the attempt to form a synthesis of Forsyth and Farrer, to a way of understanding the unity of the divine project in creation, redemption and sanctification.

If we think of our own experience as Christians who love, then it is fairly easy to discern within that love the genuine independence of beings who have been created free, the irreplaceable significance of Christ who showed us how to love, and set us free to love, and the essential presence of the Spirit in our loving, both to purify it and to make it effective. Our experience of ourselves as Christians who love would seem to contain, at least, experiences of ourselves as contingent; unable without the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit to love effectively, to act effectively as loving causes in the world. Our experience of ourselves as Christians who love would seem also to contain experiences of ourselves as fallen; unable without redemption

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through Christ, and the Spirit working out our redemption in our lives, to love at all, or at least to love fully and properly.

In seeking a synthesis of the arguments of Forsyth and Farrer we might, therefore, seek a systematic understanding of the relationship of God and evil that took as its starting point our experience of ourselves as Christians who love (and fail to love, or fail to make love effective). Such a systematic understanding would require that we show a unity of the divine project in creation, redemption and sanctification, and it seems reasonable to suggest that we could best understand God as intending to create, redeem and sanctify love, or beings who love.

I mentioned earlier that we separate the immanent and the economic trinity at our peril, and the complexities of understanding the work of God as one project mirror the complexities of understanding the three persons as One God. Obviously the model of the trinity as a community of love offers us the opportunity, if we can discern the unity of the project of the immanent trinity (to create, redeem and sanctify love, or beings who love) to relate that that unity to the unity of the economic trinity in love<sup>1</sup>.

It is clearly not appropriate to attempt an extended independent argument along these lines. We are, after all, searching for a direction for synthesis, rather than a third approach to the understanding of God

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1. Cf. *Said and Sung* chapter 23, a sermon by Austin Farrer on *Trinity of Love*.

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and evil. What I shall attempt to do, instead, is to sketch how this pattern of thought would approach the major division between physical and moral evil, by drawing on the particular strengths of each author.

If we are attempting to understand the relationship between God and evil in the world in terms of a triune project to create, redeem and sanctify love, or beings who love, what shall we find we have to say on the subject of physical evil? There is no doubt that Farrer's argument is much stronger in the discussion of physical evil than Forsyth's. Not only does he discuss physical suffering, and the destructiveness of nature directly, but he also discusses the practical implications of physical suffering for moral development. In answer to this question, therefore, it seems natural to turn to Farrer's consideration of the importance of the independence of created entities.

Farrer argues for the importance of the independence of created entities, and it is not difficult to construe this in terms of a project to create love, or beings who love. The independence granted to the material, organic and animal creation may be understood as having its own value, irrespective of any desire to create love, or beings who love. But if it is essential to love, in its fullest form, that it should be free, and unconstrained, then it seems at least plausible that beings created to love will also have to be free and unconstrained. The whole pattern of argument around independence, contingency and multiple causation, seems very suitable as a means to understand the unavoidability of physical suffering.

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There is, of course, no very obvious fall in Farrer's pattern of thought, and it is probably important, in search even of a sketch of a synthesis, to indicate a location for this idea, which is so central to Forsyth's understanding of creation. It seem probable that one might make out a case that the innocent selfishness, and egotism, which is a feature of animal nature, and indeed of child nature, is something that carries on into adult human nature, and is there something not innocent. It runs against the moral texture of the universe, as Forsyth describes it. Nor indeed is this underlying element in human nature to be regarded as blameless, since, on Farrer's account, the very foundation of human nature is language, and language carries with it the discovery, or the ability to discern, that one is one among many; that one may be subject to a rule that applies impartially to all. The fallen aspect of human nature would, on this account, be understood as an inevitable carry-over from its animal substrate, but also as something with which human nature is required and destined to struggle.

If we are attempting to understand the relationship between God and evil in the world in terms of a triune project to create, redeem and sanctify love, or beings who love, what shall we find we have to say on the subject of moral evil? As I have already, in this chapter, described Forsyth's argument as "moral theodicy, full of insight into the moral nature of God's saving work", it will be clear where I would be inclined to look for a fuller understanding of God's relationship to moral evil.

Forsyth argues for the presence of all moral evil at the Cross. In that



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act of God, moral evil was shown in its due relationship with God. That is to say, it was judged and condemned, where condemnation is to be understood as an active setting down for destruction, rather than merely an expression of feeling or value. There is a moral realism about this understanding of the relationship of God and evil, in that it cannot in any way be thought to take the existence and nature of evil lightly. As many an evangelical sermon has pointed out, if moral evil cost God the Cross, then moral evil is a serious matter<sup>1</sup>.

### 7.8 The Integration of our Experience

In the introduction to this study I expressed a conviction that with a Trinitarian keystone we could make, a stable arch out of two substantial, but unbalanced, piers. In invoking the ambiguity of Christian's own experience of their capacity for love, I have attempted to show how this might be done. We may seek, I believe, a fully theological understanding of the Christian experience of God and evil that does justice to our fallenness, our contingency, and our lovelessness.

We are created free by the Father through the Son. We are redeemed,

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1. Forsyth is using a moral metaphysic in order to present redemption and sanctification as a morally coherent project. The importance of freedom to the nature of morality means that we can accept into Forsyth's scheme something of Farrer's strictures about independence. Creation is not just morally recalcitrant, in the sense that Forsyth proposes. It is also independent. Yet within this structure of independence God can, as Farrer argues, bring goods appropriate in kind, and, I dare say, punishments or impositions appropriate as well

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without prejudice to our freedom, by the Son for the Father. We are called by the Spirit to lead lives free and redeemed, i.e. lives of Love. That love is at once fully sourced from outside ourselves, and fully appropriated by ourselves; it is free and redeemed. The Christian experience of all this as the one project of the One God is, I believe, the Christian answer to the Problem of Evil.

Major questions of course remain about whether it is possible to "experience all this as the one project of the One God". There are the two outstanding question that I highlighted in my reconstructions of Forsyth and Farrer. How can we account, while retaining Forsyth's pattern of thought, for the eternal completedness of God's work in a way that makes freedom real<sup>1</sup>? How can we understand God's causation in the world, with Farrer, by analogy with the operation of higher constitutions, without committing the absurdity of believing God to be limited by his lack of a physical nature such as our own? These are questions about the relation of Finite to Infinite, and the form of our knowledge of that relation, and they have an air of antiquity and permanence about them. We have as much reason to believe, perhaps, that they are the consequence of the failures of our human analogies, as that they are indicators of a radical incoherence in theistic thought.

In the Introduction I suggested that I would take a reconciliation of the thought of Forsyth and Farrer as evidence for three propositions:

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1. Cf. a brief but suggestive essay by David Burrell, *Divine Practical Knowing: How an Eternal God Acts in Time* in the collection *Divine Action*.

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1) There is something inherently healthy about an approach to Theology that understands itself as the attempt to clarify and articulate the ordinary experience, and the ordinary faith of believers. Theology is properly the analysis of faith.

2) It is possible and important to avoid ways of understanding God and evil that become less plausible the more evil one discovers or experiences.

3) That the Trinity is rightly central to the way Christians experience and understand God and evil.

Despite the question that I have just indicated must be left open, I hope that these central propositions been established, or at least rendered plausible. I believe that we may safely say that the question about evil and God is neither fully posed nor fully answered without the Trinity, and that the "answer" to that question lies embedded in faith and lives of ordinary Christians, created, redeemed and called.

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